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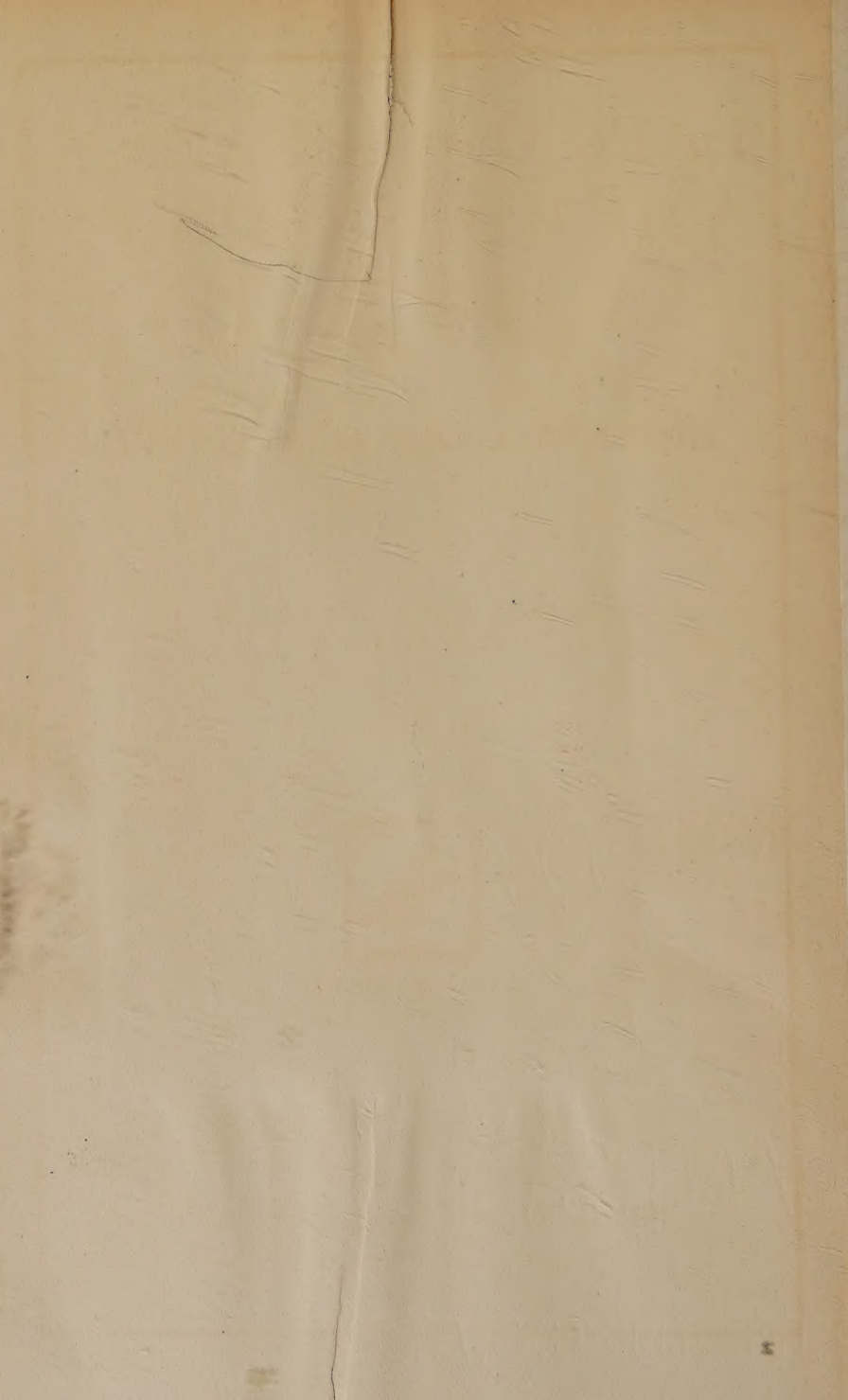




# LAFCADIO HEARN'S AMERICAN DAYS

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# LAFCADIO HEARN'S AMERICAN DAYS

BY  
EDWARD LAROCQUE TINKER

DESIGNED AND ILLUSTRATED BY  
THE AUTHOR

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
TO  
MY WIFE  
FRANCES McKEE TINKER

FOR MANY REASONS,  
ONLY ONE OF WHICH IS THAT, WITHOUT  
HER, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO BOOK

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## Introduction

Some few biographers have been animated by dislike and hate, but more often than not they are quickened to their work by an enthusiastic, partizan admiration for the personality about whom they write. This feeling is often strong enough to warp their judgment to the point of suppressing, or at least glossing any facts that place the object of their admiration in an unfavourable light, and of unduly stressing, even distorting, the creditable ones in an attempt to make of him a hero, a demi-god, or a genius.

So many biographers have been influenced in this direction that the average reader has arrived almost unconsciously at the opinion that a biography is a *very flattering* account of a person's life. But, although this method results in some excellent and even interesting mythology, can its product come strictly under the heading of biography?

By consulting various dictionaries, the composite definition is arrived at that biography is a systematic written account of an individual's life. But that is the extent of their help. It is manifestly impossible to enumerate every minute incident in a life, and on the question of what to include or exclude the dictionaries are mute—each biographer must determine for himself. Right or wrong, I have arrived at the conclusion that any fact or event that would influence in any way the judgment of an average man or woman as to the character of an-

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other is pertinent and should be included. This is the acid test I have applied to the making of this book; and if some of Hearn's friends and admirers regret my frankness, I ask them to remember that I have honestly attempted to write—not a defence or special pleading,—but a biography, accurate and impartial, without suppressions or undeserved puffings, and that I have used the utmost care and diligence in substantiating the truth of every statement.

In the course of these investigations I have met so much kindly and sympathetic assistance that I keenly appreciate this opportunity to acknowledge it. It was due to the friendly offices of Miss Margaret Douglas that I obtained the Hearn MSS. and letters that first fired my interest and inspired my quest for further knowledge. From that time on the number of my generous collaborators kept increasing until they assumed almost the proportions of a small army. I remember some fascinating hours spent with Dr. Rodolpho Matas, who had been Hearn's physician and friend in his New Orleans days. The Doctor focussed the ripe powers of judgment born of a long and distinguished medical career upon an analysis of Hearn's baffling character and his deductions were startlingly illuminating. Then, putting me under an even greater obligation, he lent me all the letters which Hearn had written him from the West Indies—a most enthralling correspondence.

There were other pleasant memories,—long walks through the old French Quarter with Mr. Harry Michel who was one of the original co-operative owners of the *Item*, and was later City Editor during the time Hearn worked on that paper. To Mr. Michel much of the life of New Orleans of the 80's and 90's was an open book,



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and it was through his assistance that I was able to locate most of the houses in which Hearn lived. He passed me on to other newspapermen who had worked beside Hearn in the early days, notably, Mr. Charles Donnaud who had been Commercial Editor of the *Item* and had known him well. Then there was Mr. William Tracy, the Business Manager of the old *Item*, and Mr. James Augustin, who was still a reporter on that paper at the time of his death, about a year ago, and Mr. Norman Walker, who had worked with Hearn on the *Times-Democrat*.

All my informants were not newspapermen, however. Mr. John Phillips, Mr. Louis Claudel, Dr. J. M. Toller and Professor Kendall of Tulane, all generously shared their memories with me, and Mr. Tom Douglas was a mine of information of the New Orleans of the end of the 19th century. Dr. Birney Guthrie told me of his childhood memories of Hearn and permitted me to use the two charming letters written to his aunt, Mrs. Amanda Guthrie Durno.

Miss Grace King, that distinguished Southern lady of letters, gave me generously of her rich fund of information about all the literary celebrities who lived in, or visited, New Orleans in the 1880's and '90's; and the prodigality of another Southern writer, Mrs. Julia Wetherill Baker, has resulted in a whole chapter. Mme. Augustin, the widow of Mr. John Augustin, told me of her husband's relations with Hearn on the *Times-Democrat*, and Mr. H. W. Robinson has given me much information about the manner in which his father, Major Robinson, helped Hearn through his first hardships in New Orleans.

To Miss Margaret Corcoran and to D. J. and Ben-

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jamin Corcoran I owe many of the details of Hearn's life at the house of their relative, Mrs. Courtney, at 68 Gasquet St.

Even yet there remain still more favours to be recounted. Mrs. Pearl Davis Jahncke put at my disposal the most interesting literary scrapbooks and material of her mother, Mrs. Mollie Moore Davis, the New Orleans authoress, whose salons are still remembered as charmingly unique. Mr. S. J. Schwartz has afforded me free access to his remarkable collection of Louisiana items and has permitted me to quote from certain Hearn letters in his library. My thanks are due to Mr. James M. Thomson for placing the files of the *Item* at my disposal, and to Mr. Nicholson for a like favour in the matter of those of the *Times-Democrat* (now the *Times-Picayune*). To Mr. William Beer, the librarian of the Howard Library, I am indebted for many courtesies and the use of all the resources of his institution; while Miss Freret, the librarian of the Louisiana State Library, was kindness itself in affording me every facility for examining the files in her charge.

I have a particularly tender feeling for the memory of the late Mr. H. E. Krehbiel, for so many years the distinguished musical critic of the New York *Tribune*. He spent hours enriching me with tales of Hearn's life and his when they were both reporters together in Cincinnati, and of their later remeeting in New York. He finally lent me all his Hearn letters. On the back of one appeared a pencilled note which read: "I shall be sorry when these become the property of mere curio hunters, H.E.K." After Mr. Krehbiel's death, Miss Emma Brazier kindly supplemented some of the information I had received from him

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An evening spent with Dr. Ellwood Hendrick will long remain in my memory. He talked of Hearn for two hours and told the full tale of their friendship. At the end I thought that only twenty minutes had passed.

Mrs. Henry M. Alden was good enough to give me certain facts she had obtained from her late husband, who so long lent distinction to the editorial chair of *Harper's Magazine*; and Mr. C. D. Weldon, the artist who accompanied Hearn to Japan, has given me the benefit both of his memories and of his correspondence. He has done a sketch, which appears in another part of the book, of Hearn as he looked, weighted down with enormous bags, when they were leaving New York together for Canada on the first lap of their journey.

Last but not least, I must acknowledge my debt to Mr. Joseph Pennell for some very acute and kindly suggestions which resulted in unearthing some important information.

These are some of the people who have made my path pleasant and my work a joy. I only hope they will realize how truly grateful I am.

EDWARD LAROCQUE TINKER.

July 14th, 1924.  
ROADS END FARM,  
EAST SETAUKET,  
LONG ISLAND.



## THE PRINCIPAL DATES IN HEARN'S LIFE

- 1850 June 27th. Born on the Isle of Santa Maura, Ionian Archipelago.
- 1852 }  
to } In Dublin, Ireland. Most of the time at his aunt's, Mrs.  
1863 } Brenane.
- 1863 }  
to } September 9th. Went to St. Cuthbert's College, Ushaw,  
1868 } England, and remained there until the latter year.
- 1868 }  
to } A short time at the Jesuit School of the "Petits Precepteurs"  
1869 } at Yvetot, France. Some few weeks in Paris.  
1869 } A few months in London at the house of Catherine, Mrs.  
1869 } Brenane's ex-parlor-maid. These dates are not absolutely  
1869 } provable.
- 1869 }  
to } New York City.  
1871 }
- 1871 }  
to } Cincinnati, Ohio, until October of the latter year.  
1877 }
- 1872 to 1875, on the *Enquirer*.  
1875 to 1877, October, on the *Commercial*.
- 1877 }  
to } November. In New Orleans, La., until June of the latter  
1887 } year.
- 1878, June, to 1881, December 3rd, Associate Editor of  
the *Item*.  
1881, December 4th, to 1887, June 1st, Editorial Staff  
of the *T-D*.  
1884, April, short trip to Florida.  
July and August at Grand Isle, La.  
1886, Summer, at Grand Isle again.
- 1887 June 3rd to the middle of July, New York City.  
July (middle) to first week of September, first West Indian  
trip.  
September to October 2nd, New York City and Metuchen,  
N. J.



1887 }  
to } October 2nd, second West Indian trip, until May (1st week)  
1889 } of the latter year.

May (1st week), 1889, New York City for only one or two days.

May to October, Philadelphia with Dr. Gould.

1889 }  
to } October, New York City, until March 6th of the latter year.  
1890 }

On which date he left for Japan, where he remained until

1904 September 26th, when he died.

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## I: How He Came to the United States

PATRICIO LAFCADIO TESSIMA CARLOS HEARN, to give him the full benefit of his staggering patronymic, was born June 27, 1850, on the Isle of Santa Maura, off the coast of Greece. Even though we are concerned only with his "AMERICAN DAYS," a short rehearsal of the main facts of his life up to the time of his arrival in this country becomes necessary, for nothing so assists in reaching a true understanding of another human being (always a difficult task at best) as to learn of idiosyncrasies of ancestry and conditions of youthful environment. As Hearn's peculiarities and mental affinities were entirely the result of such influences, a knowledge of the early impressions he received, at a time when his character was most ductile, assumes particular importance as a key to his baffling personality.

His father, Charles Bush Hearn, an Anglo-Irish

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Surgeon-Major of a British Infantry regiment, was a handsome, dashing officer and, it is intimated, of rather an amorous disposition which probably accounts for certain "Don Juan" characteristics that his son later developed—characteristics possibly accentuated by a strain of wild Gypsy blood which, according to family traditions, had crept into the Hearn genealogy several generations back.

The chances of the British service resulted in the Major's regiment being ordered to duty on one of the Ionian Isles just off the coast of Greece. Here amusements were so meagre that time hung heavily on his hands, so it is not surprising that a man of his ardent temperament should have fallen a victim to the charms of a lovely Greek girl—Rosa Tessima. There are vague rumours as to the manner of his wooing—hints as to a terrible battle between the prospective bridegroom and the brothers of the bride-to-be—all rather nebulous. But there exists no uncertainty as to the fact that the Major married Rosa Tessima and that the second child of this union was Lafcadio Hearn, the first son having died soon after birth.

Traces of exotic blood are not confined to the Hearn side of the family tree alone, for the Greek progenitors of most of the island families had, either by inclination or capture, miscegenated with both Moors and Arabs. Mrs. Hearn's family was, probably, no exception to this rule, so it is possible—nay, almost certain, that the young Lafcadio was a queer sort of human cocktail, having a little dash of everything—English, Gypsy, Irish, Greek, Arab and Moor, and that he was heir to all the antagonistic qualities of these illy-assorted races.



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These warring inherited instincts were to have a large part in moulding his life, for they made of his soul a battleground. Frank Oriental sensuousness was shamed, but not curbed, by Anglo-Saxon self-control. Gallic expansiveness tried to break through Arab impassivity, and all the while Gypsy lure of the road and love of new location lashed his life to restlessness; in short, what one set of inherited impulses bade him do, another inhibited, until all constructive action was paralyzed. Unfortunately, those that were most prejudicial to his own interests and happiness, were the ones that generally came out on top. Only his literary creative abilities seemed to escape this blight, but even this freedom was only partial as he used to often complain that for months on end he could not write a line that satisfied him.

A knowledge of these psychical biases makes it easier to understand why Hearn was perfectly incompetent to meet and cope with the ordinary conditions of modern existence and why his life became a long series of mistakes that caused him untold suffering and prevented him from ever being truly happy.

He lived on the Island of Santa Maura until he was two years old when his soldier father was ordered to the West Indies. With true masculine lack of perspicacity, the Major shipped his Catholic wife and their son to his relatives in Dublin where, after disagreements with the Protestant branch of the family, they found refuge with his aunt, Mrs. Sarah Brenane.

Aunt Sarah, from all accounts, was not a sympathetic soul; a convert to Catholicism, she was more Catholic than those born in the faith and her prepossession as to the final destination of her soul precluded the

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possibility of devoting much of her time or attention to the happiness of those around her.

It is not strange that this lovely, lonely Greek mother could not long endure this unsympathetic atmosphere in a country so foreign and far away from her relatives and friends. The inevitable happened in a few years and Mrs. Hearn returned to her beloved island.

Poor Lafcadio, now a child of seven, was left to the mercy of the severe religious training of Mrs. Brenane and to her neglect in all other matters. She conceived the idea that he should be educated for the priesthood and there followed years of schooling in various Catholic boarding institutions, broken now and then by cheerless vacations in the cold religious atmosphere of his aunt's house.

In 1863, at the age of thirteen, he was sent to St. Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, in the Yorkshire Hills near Durham, and it was while there he had a very serious accident. Playing a game called "Giant's Strides," a wooden handle on the end of a rope flew back and struck him in the face. This blow followed by lack of attention caused him to lose the sight of his left eye and, to intensify the catastrophe, the iris became covered with a milky film.

He had always been near-sighted; a fact no one had ever taken the trouble to discover or correct. Now his right eye had to do double duty and this added tax caused it to become permanently swollen to twice its natural size. Eye strain undermined his health and nerves and this, in turn, increased his natural shyness and sensitiveness to such a point as to amount to positive morbidity. An obsession resulted that tortured and embittered his whole life—he imagined that, on account of

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his eyes, he was repulsive to every one and especially women. Indeed he was so harassed by this idea that he developed a trick of putting his hand over his blind eye as he talked and it was only when he became so interested as to forget himself, that he removed it and one saw his entire face.

It was not strange then that Hearn turned more and more to books. The usual boyish outdoor games were barred by his lack of vision, and his obsessive idea made social intercourse with strangers as painful as a major operation without an anæsthetic. Through books he could hold communion with others without being tortured by the fear of what they might think of him—through books he found he could lift himself into other far pleasanter worlds.

Hearn continued at Ushaw for a while longer, seldom leaving even to spend his holidays with Mrs. Brenane. He had come to that age when all boys begin to try to solve the riddle of the universe for themselves and his omnivorous reading, especially among the early classics, had given him a distinct bias toward Greek theories. Imagine the consternation of the pious Jesuit fathers when Hearn, one day, informed them that he had become a *Pantheist*. They wrestled and pled with him to no purpose, punished him and finally threatened him with dismissal unless he disavowed his sacrilegious opinions within a certain time. Hearn, firm with all a boy's obstinacy in the face of what he considers persecution, refused to recant and so was ignominiously sacked.

A certain haziness, never completely dispelled, has always enveloped the next few years of his life.

There was nothing vicious about the boy, he was merely having intellectual growing pains, and a little

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human sympathy and understanding would have been sufficient, just at this crisis, to have changed the whole course of his career. But this, the bigoted Mrs. Brenane could not supply. Instead, it is the generally accepted theory that, horrified by the Jesuits' report on her infidel nephew and the shocking disgrace his impious conduct had brought upon the family, she impersonally shipped him to the Jesuit school of the "Petits Precepteurs" in France, which was situated at Yvetot near Rouen. How long he stayed there no one knows. He was probably no better able to endure the strict discipline, the insistence upon the mortification of the flesh and the implacable imposition of religious dogma of this institution than he had been at Ushaw, so it is more than likely that his stay was not of long duration. He shortly ran away, it is believed, and took refuge in Paris. The tales which he told in later life of his experiences with artists in the Latin Quarter confirm this. Those weeks left an indelible impression upon the romantic imagination of a lad whose passionate love of the beautiful had been starved and repressed all his life.

It was before the Franco-Prussian War and the fermentations of impending events made Paris one huge sounding-board for talk—talk about war, about politics, about Saint-Saëns, the coming pianist, about George Sand's latest liaison or Gambetta's theatric thunderings in court. Some of the colossal literary figures that have lent distinction to the Romantic movement were still alive and making all Paris buzz by their mighty pens. Victor Hugo was firing from exile his frightful fulminations against the third Napoleon and rumours of a new novel by Gautier about to appear were electrifying

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Parisian literary circles. For the first time this emotional boy, whose every natural instinct had been sternly repressed in the chilling atmosphere of the religious schools in which he had passed most of his life, discovered men who made of passion an hedonistic cult, who adorned it with every resource of their genius and learning, and whose books treated of the elaborate fulfilment of those secret desires that had tormented him.

It was inevitable that this sensuous, beauty-famished waif should have become so saturated with a passionate admiration for the masters of the French Romantic school that it moulded the whole course of his literary progress.

Evidently, when knowledge of Hearn's latest escapade was brought to Mrs. Brenane, she gave up all hope of keeping him in any school. Casting about in her mind for some solution of the problem of what to do with her recalcitrant nephew, she remembered a faithful ex-parlor maid, Catherine by name, who had left her service to marry a stevedore and was living near the docks in London. Mrs. Brenane solved her difficulty by sending Hearn to Catherine, paying her a small amount monthly for his board and lodging. How he lived and employed himself during his stay in London will never be fully known, but strangely enough the impression which London made upon him has been preserved in a vivid little description of that city published years afterward in the *Item*.

### "LONDON"

"The Nation, in a clever review of Mr. Hare's interesting 'Walks in London,' observes that 'in



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point of architectural dreariness London has touched bottom and done its worst,' although 'the most interesting city in the world and well adapted for being the handsomest.' This is certainly true; but it is also true that in the very dreariness of this modern Babylon—in the vast gloom of the city that Heine so rightly terms 'the world's pyloric artery'—lies the great romance of the great metropolis. The Spirit of London—the influence of the huge capital about whose very name there is an echo of ponderous immensity—can be understood only after long familiarity, and is seldom felt by travellers who fancy they have 'seen London' during a residence of a few weeks. 'I have been driving in London for thirty years,' said a cab driver once to the writer, 'but I don't know London yet.' Perhaps Doré alone ever reflected the true spirit, the real influence of the city, in his powerful drawings. It is something rather to be felt than described. It has seldom been caught by writers native to the city, and much more rarely by foreigners.

"London may be said to have an atmosphere peculiarly its own; and its phenomenal fogs are proverbial throughout the world. They are of a yellowish brown, extraordinarily dense, and long-enduring—so as to hide the sun for many successive days, and necessitate the use of gas at noonday. It has—among its four million of inhabitants—a distinct London people, with marked peculiarities of dialect and habit. It has curiosities of social, commercial, and industrial regulations not to be found in any other city of the world, and it has a strange influence upon those who seek familiarity with it which may be felt nowhere else on the earth.



## How He Came to the United States

“After a sojourn of many months in London’s heart, when the traveller begins to feel his life throb in unison with the pulse of the mighty city—when he has become slightly familiar with the enormous labyrinths of streets—when he has measured, step by step, the distances separating the parks—when he has a vague knowledge of the huge systems of docks and subterranean railroads and viaducts—when he has caught the great artistic impressions of London, the grimy grey, lithographic tones of its vistas of brick and stone—then he will probably experience that sensation described by Kinglake in his chapter on the Pyramids, a nightmarish comprehension of Solid Immensity. Only then does he begin to comprehend London.

“But it is by night alone that one feels the full influence of London, the full romance of its vastness and its gloom. If you go about twilight to the centre of some one of the great parks—Regent’s, Victoria or Hyde Park—you will hear the great tide of the city’s life ebbing away in the night. You will feel the earth trembling to the thunder of the great currents of business, flowing off through the interminable channels of streets. You will hear the Roar of London growing lower and more distant, till it sinks into a deep, steady hum that lives through the night and deepens into the dawn. Then when the stars come out, if you wander to the Embankment through a million of lights, you may behold a spectacle unapproached in sublimity by any other city of the earth—the black river moaning between its banks of stone; the great masses of Westminster spires looming up in the night; the bridges spanning the stream with their arches of illuminations; the phosphoric face of the great

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clock two hundred feet above you; the granite visage of grim river gods frowning from the corbels of the steamboat piers; and, at intervals, the flame-eyed engines roaring by, like monsters, dragging after them their long vertebræ of cars. Then, perhaps, you can feel what London is.”<sup>1</sup>

Hearn could expect nothing from his father. The Major had married again and all his small army pay was devoted to the support of his new wife and his children by her, and she took no interest in her two stepsons—Lafcadio and his younger brother. Hearn had to look entirely to Mrs. Brenane for support. Indeed she, having no children of her own, had given him to understand that he would be her heir. For this reason he stayed on in London at her behest. But, unfortunately, Mrs. Brenane had fallen under the influence of one Henry Molyneux, a fanatic co-religionist who, by that time, had squandered her fortune in bad investments and so destroyed Hearn's hope of heritage. The credulous woman had become a pensioner in the house of her despoiler and he, because he wished to rid himself of Hearn and the possibility of embarrassing future questions, found it easy to poison the old lady's mind against her nephew and persuade her he was nothing but an undeserving young infidel.

This once accomplished, the next step was easy—he induced her to agree to ship Hearn to America.

In some obscure way the boy connected in his mind his great unhappiness in various Jesuit schools with the fact that both Molyneux and Mrs. Brenane were most bigoted Catholics and, from this vague beginning, he

<sup>1</sup> *The Daily City Item*, June 29, 1878.

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persuaded himself that the loss of his inheritance was due in some manner to the machinations of the Jesuits who had used Molyneux as a tool to punish him for his avowed heterodoxy at Ushaw. This became the basis of his persistent hatred of the Catholic Church and more especially of the Jesuits. His feeling became so fierce that it amounted to a delusion of persecution which was never weakened as long as he lived.

In 1869 Lafcadio was given passage money and put aboard ship for New York. He was instructed to go, upon his arrival, to Cincinnati and there apply to a brother-in-law of Molyneux, Cullinane by name, in whose care money was to be forwarded for him.

He arrived in the United States a boy of seventeen, handicapped by bad eyesight, poor health and unconquerable timidity. Notwithstanding these many impediments he was so bitter toward his aunt and Molyneux that he determined to accept none of their money and, instead of going to Cincinnati, he stayed in New York to try his fortune.

What he did and how he lived during the two years he remained will always be a mystery for, in later days, he displayed an aversion to speaking of this period of his life. To a friend in New Orleans, Mr. Claudel, he said that he had stayed in the house of an old lawyer who had a passion for Greek and that while there he had earned his way by copying briefs for his patron. These had bristled with quotations in Greek characters and Hearn had copied them, just as he would copy a design, without having the faintest idea as to their meaning.

Various other reports of his experiences have survived, one that a chance-found friend, an old Irishman,

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had kept him from starving and another that his necessities forced him to become for a time a waiter in a cheap restaurant. Nevertheless, he endured two years of this hand-to-mouth existence before he was beaten. Then wanderlust and want drove him to Cincinnati.

. . . . .





## II: Cincinnati, 1871-1877

How he got money for the journey no one knows, but it is certain that Hearn arrived in Cincinnati in 1871 penniless. He was hungry so he may be forgiven for weakening and going to see Cullinane, who gave him a small sum of money and then washed his hands of him. This visit was the last. Once more began the same monotonous round of hunger and hardship, loneliness and discouragement that had embittered his life in New York. For a day he got a job as messenger boy, but he could not stand the jibes of his youthful companions. For the same space of time he peddled mirrors for a Syrian master, with equal lack of success. At times he had nowhere to go and spent the night in a rusty boiler, junked in a vacant lot, took refuge in packing boxes thrown out at the back of some store, or even slept in haylofts, after having carefully removed and folded his



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one suit, in order to keep it halfway presentable. Often he was half starved.

Thomas Vickers, the librarian of the Public Library, gave him a job as private secretary and this Hearn enjoyed because it gave him access to books. But this very advantage proved his undoing, for he paid more attention to them than to his duties.

One staunch friend he did make—Henry Watkins, the old English printer. He was kind to the boy, sympathized with his ambitions and let him sleep in his shop on a huge pile of paper shavings, clipped from the edges of books. Under his tuition Hearn learned typesetting which enabled him to get a job as proof-reader and typesetter with the Robert Clarke Company. But his designs and desires lay along other lines. He never could have stuck to a purely mechanical job. Realizing this, the kindly old Englishman got him a position on a trade paper owned by Colonel Barney, called the "Trade List." This was better than the preceding one, but was grinding and stultifying at best, so Hearn spent all his spare moments writing queer fantastic tales in order not to have his literary ambitions entirely aborted.

It was with one of these stories, grasped nervously in his hand, that he one day presented himself to Col. John Cockerill, the editor of the Cincinnati *Enquirer*. Shrinkingly he asked if outside contributions were ever paid for, and when the Colonel answered that such a thing was possible, Hearn pulled a manuscript from under his coat, placed it on the desk and faded from the room, like some queer little Irish leprechaun. The Colonel was so impressed with the article that he sent for him and gave him a job.

At first he worked in Cockerill's office, quiet as a



## Cincinnati

ghost, his nose weaving back and forth a scant inch from the paper, as he wrote special Sunday articles of a weird imaginative kind. Later it was determined to make a reporter of him and then followed a period of trying tests before it could be decided what kind of work he could do best. He was sent out to get an interview and stayed away four hours. When he got back he reported he had been unable to get his man, but investigation proved that he had spent the entire time walking up and down in front of the man's house unable to summon sufficient courage to ring the bell. As the Colonel said, "If Hearn was sent to interview any one, the person would have to come out into the street and invite him in or he would come back empty-handed."

Experiment proved, however, that he was able to report meetings of the Board of Education and that sort of thing, for he could sit in a corner and, without being forced to ask questions, write what transpired.

This monotonous kind of hack work was Hearn's until, in 1874, his big opportunity came. He was then just twenty-four years old.

A peculiarly horrible murder occurred, known as the "Tan Yard Case," in which the murderer had attempted to burn the corpse of his victim, with only partial success. The whole city was horrified. The star reporters had described the first and second days of the sensation in the stereotyped newspaper manner. On the third, Hearn was given the assignment to write something. After seeing the half-charred body, he wrote an account of it, so ghastly, so overpowering in its horripilating details, so gruesomely vivid that, from the newspaper point of view, it made the sensation of the whole case.

Hearn's reputation was made and his salary increased,

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but this led to his being given the hardest assignment on the whole paper—covering the police stations at night, which was the time the most sensational cases were likely to be reported.

His success had a queer influence and awakened strange, unhealthy mental predilections. It was reported that he went to the scene of a murder and skated on the blood which covered the floor, just as boys take a running slide on ice. He appeared to revel in the revolting and to be happy only in the horrible. He even studiously set about collecting a vocabulary of unusual words, that has never been equalled, with which to describe these horrors.

This repugnant obsession for the macabre was evinced in other cases he reported with Henry E. Krehbiel who had become his firm friend. At that time Krehbiel was a reporter on the *Gazette*, a rival paper, although in after years he became the distinguished dean of musical critics of the United States. One day, as the two friends were waiting at Police Headquarters, word came that a suicide had occurred in a nearby precinct. They hurried to the house, which was in a poor district, and climbed an outside staircase to a room on the second floor. There lay a man, calm-faced, his blue flannel shirt rolled back from the neck far enough to show a neat round hole just above his heart. No blood appeared except a thin circle of coagulation around the wound. Krehbiel, rather shaken, exclaimed, "My God! I know that man, my father helped him. The last time I saw him he was a waiter at—", but Hearn, fascinated by the inscrutable face and the small fatal hole, seemed not to be listening. In fact he interrupted and began to descant upon the beautiful technique of the suicide. He

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concluded by saying that the only time a suicide had approached this one in nicety of execution was the case of a French dancing master who had carefully donned his dress clothes before committing the act. All the time Hearn looked at the corpse in a perfectly detached way, without a single sign of emotion or pity, beyond a certain repellent morbid gloating over the grisly details. This strange mental distortion is hard to understand in Hearn as, in after years, he always showed himself to be the most tender-hearted of men, to whom an act of cruelty was the one unpardonable crime.

The modern psycho-analyst would, of course, say that his early training and later poverty and methods of living, had caused him to suppress all his natural sensuous inclinations and that these, as a result, had been perverted and had finally come to the surface disguised as an almost Sadistic interest in the morbid; but a more direct explanation is that Hearn had made his first success by his super-morbid handling of the "Tan Yard Case" and that he was attempting to duplicate that success along the same lines, and his indifference was accounted for by the fact that his desire to obtain recognition was so obsessive that he regarded each new tragedy simply as "grist for his mill" and was blinded to the pathetic human aspect. One may take one's choice.

Hearn showed his interest in the macabre and also his peculiar method of handling a reportorial problem in one other case on which he worked with Krehbiel. One Sunday afternoon a young girl committed suicide by shooting herself in the breast, in the reception room of the Burnett hotel. She had been wildly infatuated with a theatrical man and had dogged him from city to city. A diary, found beside her, recounted the growth of her

insane jealousy when her lover became Mary Anderson's manager. The last line was pathetic, for, in the conventional manner of the melodramatic stage, she had written, "He has spurned me and he shall die." Something softened her heart, however, and she shot herself instead. When the two reporters arrived she lay stretched out on the marble hearth-stone, a tuberose maculated with her blood, pinned on her bosom. Hearn obtained all these facts, but only one detail captured his imagination to the exclusion of everything else. It was the blood-stained flower and his whole story was written around it.

This was very typical of his peculiarities as a reporter. He could not interview and it was always difficult for him to do a straight news account of any happening because, generally, as in this case, some seemingly unimportant detail held for him an obscure emotional appeal and round it he erected a literary structure that was "feature writing"—yes, but certainly not news reporting. In fact it was due entirely to this ability to write "feature articles" that he was enabled to earn his living as a newspaper man for thirteen years. As an ordinary reporter he could not have earned his salt.

Luckily for Hearn, his friend Krehbiel was a healthy-minded, well-poised individual who tried to bring more normal interests into his life. As both had the same assignment for their respective papers, they were much together and, as they walked from precinct to precinct late at night, they discussed all sorts of subjects that occurred to their avid minds—Greek art, folk songs, the influence of sex or Chinese literature. They even made pilgrimages to the foreign quarter of the town to hear strange music and pick up bits of folklore and, on their



olidays, they often wandered down to the levee to watch the negroes "juba dancing." Even then Hearn had begun his search for the different, the strange, the exotic—a quest that held him a slave until his death.

He loved Krehbiel and admired him immoderately, but then that was Hearn's way, he always imagined his friends had every heroic quality and mental attribute until such time as some little unrealized action on their part interfered to change his picture of them. Then his affection turned to contempt and suspicious hatred so great that he never again, willingly, saw them. But as long as the friend remained an object of worship there was nothing he would not do for him. Thus it was that Hearn, knowing Krehbiel's interest in all sorts of music, hurried into the office of the *Gazette* one afternoon in a great state of excitement. Almost stuttering in his anxiety he said, "Judge Schwab has just levied on a Chinese laundry and there are lots of Chinese musical instruments that are going to be sold for rent. Hurry, you must go and buy them." They rushed over to the court-room, but arrived only to learn that Char Lee, the laundryman, his musician's soul having triumphed over his business instinct, had already redeemed his precious instruments. Not to be daunted they started for the laundry, nose to the trail. They were met with that very natural suspicion of the Oriental after he had had his first experience with American lower courts of justice. Krehbiel said he wanted to see the instruments, Char Lee grunted and demurred. Seeing a "serpent-bellied san-hein" Krehbiel reached over and took it from the wall. With a few preliminary strummings to verify the tuning, he played several ancient Chinese airs. The sound of ancestral music melted all suspicion from the

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heart of Char Lee and he, in turn, took the instrument and played. All thought of work and the office slipped from their minds and was forgotten in the fascination of Oriental harmonies (or lack of it), and there these two friends stayed till long after supper time.

It was to this adventure that Hearn referred when, some ten years after, he dedicated his little book, "Some Chinese Ghosts."

"TO MY FRIEND,  
HENRY EDWARD KREHBIEL  
THE MUSICIAN,  
WHO, SPEAKING THE SPEECH OF MELODY UNTO THE  
CHILDREN OF TIEN-HIA,—  
UNTO THE WANDERING TSING-JIN, WHOSE SKINS  
HAVE THE COLOR OF GOLD,—  
MOVED THEM TO MAKE STRANGE SOUNDS UPON THE  
SERPENT-BELLIED SAN-HEIN;  
PERSUADED THEM TO PLAY FOR ME UPON THE  
SHRIEKING YA-HIN;  
PREVAILED ON THEM TO SING ME A SONG OF THEIR  
NATIVE-LAND,—  
THE SONG OF MOHLI'-HWA,—  
THE SONG OF THE JASMIN-FLOWER."

Was there ever verse more mellifluous, more liquid in sound, more colourful than this prose dedication!

The "Tan Yard Case" was followed by other journalistic successes less grisly. Hearn, usually as timid as a hare, had courage enough to dare any personal danger if it became a question of his securing a new sensation about which to write. He balked only when forced to face and interview a strange human being. Hearing





To My Friend

Henry Edward Krehbiel,

The Master-Musician,

Who, Speaking the Speech of Melody  
unto the Children of Tien-Hia,—

Unto the Wandering Tsing-jin whose skins  
have the color of gold,—

Moved them to make strange sounds upon  
the Serpent-bellied San-hien,—

Persuaded them to play for me upon the  
Shrieking Ya-hin,—

Prevailed on them to sing me a Song of  
their Native Land:

The Song of Mohli-Hwa,—

The Song of the Jasmine-Flower.



Draft of dedication which Hearn sent to Krehbiel.

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that the lightning rod on the steeple of St. Patrick's Cathedral was to be repaired, he hunted up the steeple-jack and persuaded him, though reluctant, to agree to take him up.

The time came and Hearn arrived, accompanied by some of the men from the *Enquirer*, who were ready, I'm afraid, to write scare heads should their fellow reporter be dashed to the sidewalk, a pulpy red blot. One of the editors offered him a pair of powerful field-glasses, but Hearn waved them aside, saying, "No, something might happen to them."

The steeple jack and his companion started their ascent. They went as far as they could in the vitals of the spire, but were soon forced to climb out of a mul-lioned window and trust themselves to the frail support of ladders that had already been tied in place. Tiny Hearn squirmed on to the steeple jack's back and wound his arms and legs firmly about him. The nerve-racking careful climb started and, to the anxious watchers below, the figures, inching their way to heaven on that almost perpendicular incline, were gradually scaled down to the general appearance of a hump-backed monkey.

The summit safely surmounted, Hearn planted his feet on the bars of the cross and expressed his contempt for the world in the manner made famous in Paris by that Rabelaisian giant, Gargantua.

Only some new emotional experience seemed to have the power to set in motion the machinery of Hearn's imagination and this explains why he was ceaseless in his search for new sensations. He even, at one time, became obsessed with the idea that he must watch an artist painting from the nude. He had two artist

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friends, Frank Duveneck and H. F. Farney, both of whom he pestered to death until one, which is uncertain, finally consented to smuggle him into his studio.

It was all arranged and the weird little figure was hidden behind a screen before the artist brought in his model and posed her so that she could get no glimpse of the strange large eye that peeped out and then snapped back again. The painter, thinking to play a joke on Hearn, and keep him an unwilling prisoner, solemnly continued to paint for two hours. He failed of his purpose, for Hearn was breathlessly interested for the full period, alternately leaning out to make observations and dodging back to write a record of his minutest impressions in a notebook held so close to his eye that it nearly rubbed his nose.

Vitalized by this experience, Hearn's imagination fabricked a panegyric on the beauty of the nude so delightfully and delicately phrased, that even the mid-Victorian readers of the *Enquirer* found nothing at which to cavil.

Another incident occurred which afforded striking evidence of the close interrelation of the two great forces which shared empire in his life. Almost his every action was traceable to the influence either of physical passion or of love of beauty. It was the former that kept him always wandering in the tropics until he finally found an emotional haven in Japan, but it was his worship of beauty that drove him to the enormous industry which his poetic prose necessitated, an industry that devoted eight months to perfecting seventy-three pages of MS.

One night Hearn and two friends went to visit a house of questionable character (or to be more accurate, there was no question at all about the nature of the

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place). After being there some time the other two were ready to leave. Becoming worried because Hearn did not rejoin them, they started out to find him. Going upstairs again, they chanced to look through the crack of a door and saw a nude woman standing in the middle of the floor and Hearn, crouching down, his myopic eye not two inches from her body, progressing slowly round and round her in hesitating circles, muttering to himself: "Yes, the Greeks were right—very right—there is no line in nature so beautiful as the curve of a woman's hip."

The friendship with Farney, whom Hearn described in later years as "an Alsatian, a fine man and a superb sketcher—though lazy as a serpent," resulted in his first attempt to be an editor. Together they conceived the grandiose idea that a weekly "devoted to Art, Literature and Satire" would be a paying proposition. Hearn was to supply most of the Literature and Satire and Farney the Art. The name chosen for this ambitious publication was *Ye Giglampz*, in honor of the enormous spectacles which Hearn wore at this period of his life. In fact the cover, drawn by Farney, has a quaint little figure with bulging eyes and heavy pince-nez perched on a prominent nose, that bears a strong resemblance to Hearn in the act of bowing to the public.

The first number was published June 21, 1874, and eight out of the twelve columns of print were contributed by Hearn. The amount of his work continued to decrease in each succeeding number until the eighth and last had only one column by him. The child of the mated genius of Hearn and Farney died almost stillborn. It at least proved that Hearn was totally incapable of producing humour at this period of his life. He made

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one weak attempt at being funny and gave up, reverting, in his contributions, to a type of fantasy which was gruesome, bloody and rather sensuous. Indeed it needed all of Farney's diplomacy to prevent him from being so frankly suggestive in his articles as to interfere with the sale of the paper.

Hearn, as we know, had already come, almost slavishly, under the influence of that school of French writers of which Flaubert, Gautier and Baudelaire were the most dazzling beacons. Their work displayed a sensuous quality, so frank as to be possible only to Latins, but so clothed in the perfect phrase—the "mot juste," so elaborated in a welter of carefully wrought details that, although their books were marvels of polished pornography, they were like a fine old tapestry of Leda and the Swan—the lasciviency was forgotten in the beauty of design and execution. It was these very qualities that had so captured Hearn's imagination. All his life he had worshipped beauty and literary craftsmanship. He too was a sensualist—his Oriental inheritance foreordained that, and all his affinities were entirely French. He jokingly called himself a "vile Latin" and a "vicious French-hearted scalawag." All these things made it not only natural but inevitable that he should continue as a disciple of this school of voluptuous Romanticism.

Before he became engrossed in *Giglampz*, all his spare time had been devoted to making translations of these authors whom he so admired. He had completed a translation of Gautier's "Avatar," but had found no editor brave enough to fly in the face of the puritanical public opinion of the Middle West of the 1870's. To have published it would have been like introducing an Indian Nautch dancer at a meeting of "The Ladies' Aid



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Society." Hearn finally realized this and burnt his MS., but his confidence in the correctness of his literary appreciation was, in no way, shaken—so, as soon as the demise of *Giglampz* restored to him his meagre leisure, he started to do a translation of Gautier's "One of Cleopatra's Nights." Flaubert's "Temptation of Saint Anthony" followed. Spare moments at Police Headquarters, when news was slow in coming in, found him writing by the poor light of flickering gas jets. When he returned to the office at one or two in the morning he often worked until sunrise instead of going home to bed like a reasonable man. He never let a day go by that he did not finish one or two pages, and all this was in addition to the tremendous amount of writing he had to do as his nightly stint for the newspaper.

It was enough to blind a man with two eyes, let alone a one-eyed myopic. This strain, followed on years of life in cheap boarding-houses, bad food snatched at odd times, twelve to fourteen hours of night work—all combined, had undermined his health and blackened all his hopes. His eyesight was failing and he feared that blindness would soon end his chances of ever turning out a literary masterpiece which would satisfy himself—his own severest critic.

Sick, rebellious, discouraged, struggling in a morass from which he saw no escape, he, as usual, did the one thing that pushed him more hopelessly into the mire. He seemed to have a perfect genius for complicating his life. If one line of action could more thoroughly cook his goose than another, intuitively he chose the more fatal course. This time he became entangled with a negress by the name of Althea Foley.

It is difficult to understand or explain this infatua-



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tion. Maybe Baudelaire's frank preference for ebony charms, so exotically expressed in his poetry, had aroused a lascivious curiosity in Hearn or, possibly, some atavistic inclination stirred his blood, legacy of a Moorish forbear whose harem had been filled with Nubian concubines.

One of his biographers tells picturesque tales of mistaken high-mindedness, the story going that Althea, a pretty, well-made octoroon girl, was a servant in a grimy boarding-house where Hearn was living. On cold winter nights, when he used to get home at impossible hours exhausted from his work, he always found food that she kept hot for him and when his clothes were wet from rain or sleet, she dried them at her fire. She mothered him with kindly physical attentions—the first he had received for years. He was English and therefore had much less color prejudice than his associates. These attentions insensibly drifted into a liaison. He became seriously ill and Althea nursed him devotedly—he thought she saved his life. Burdened with gratitude, he, quixotically, decided to right the wrong by marrying the girl, which caused her as much surprise as it did every one else.

The men who knew him best, at this time, have tacitly kept silent as to this incident, but sufficient has been said to make it certain that the affair was not conducted on any such high plane of self-sacrifice on his part. On the contrary, one intimated that Althea's mode of living was as shady as her complexion, and that instead of being a servant she was an inmate of a house in the segregated district, and that instead of Hearn's being actuated by a high moral purpose of atonement, he was simply the victim of an overpowering carnal infatuation.

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Whichever explanation one may choose will in no way change the fact that Hearn insisted he was going to marry Althea. His friends Krehbiel, Joseph Tunison and Farney pled with him to no purpose. He was unmovably stubborn, as he always was after he had assumed an untenable position, and he finally applied for a marriage license. This was refused him because Ohio had a law making marriage between whites and negroes illegal. In spite of this he went through with some sort of a ceremony. We know this to be a fact, for after Hearn died Althea Foley sued in the courts to recover a widow's share of the royalties from his books. The Judge decided against her on the theory that there could be no legal marriage between the races on account of the law against miscegenation, but added that he had no doubt but that some sort of ceremony had been performed.

Hearn soon realized how asinine his actions had been, but it was too late. The harm that had been done was to be far-reaching and destined to shade his predilection for all time.

News of the open scandal soon reached the ears of the powers that governed the destinies of the *Enquirer* and they felt forced to dispense with his services. He found work on the *Commercial*, but at a smaller salary. He had been getting \$25 a week, but now it was \$22. Thus it is evident that scandal reduced the value of his reportorial services just \$3. His condition was no whit ameliorated by the change—he simply swapped masters. The limitations of his life remained just as mean and bitter; his health and sight continued to be undermined by the long, late, irregular hours and, to make matters worse, his supersensitive nature was being tortured by

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the semi-ostracism which his affair with Althea had brought upon him.

The obsession possessed him of creating beauty—prose poems, every syllable of which should be as carefully placed and as gleamingly colourful as the facets of a glorious jewel, and he keenly craved the leisure necessary to the production of such masterpieces.

The dull killing grind that aborted this ambition had become unbearable, and it was natural, under these circumstances, that his dormant wanderlust should, once more, awaken.

He had sucked Cincinnati dry of new experiences of the kind that served to inspire his creative faculties. The tropics with their possibilities of strange and wonderful adventure, their balmy climate instead of the cold which he always so detested, were dragging at him. A description of an old Mississippi River plantation, overheard by chance, set the spark that fired his final decision—he would go to New Orleans.

It was the year of the famous Hayes-Tilden presidential campaign and there was great excitement as the election turned on four pivotal states, in each of which a recount had been ordered. Louisiana was one of them. Of course Ohio was feverish about the outcome as Hayes was a native son. Hearn's sudden desire therefore marched with Editor Murat Halsted's need, and the *Commercial* agreed to pay his expenses to New Orleans and commissioned him to write of the recount and the political conditions there.

One night in the latter part of October three people met at the station to see Hearn off. One was, of course, old Mr. Watkin, and the other two were Murat Halsted and Edward Henderson, another editor of the *Com-*

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*mercial.* Hearn was too excited by the prospect of new adventure to notice that Mr. Watkin turned away to hide a brimming eye.

The train carried Hearn as far as Memphis, Tenn., and there he had to await the coming of the steamboat for New Orleans, which plied up and down the river on a schedule no more certain than that of a Mississippi catfish. He was forced to wait over a week—which made a serious hole in his meagre finances. He stayed in an enormous, barnlike hotel, so dilapidated that it depressed him, and many nights, so he confessed in a letter to Watkin, he spent in crying from sheer loneliness. Lost in his huge, ghostly bedroom, he became a mere human microbe filled with misery.

The Confederate, General N. B. Forrest died while he was there, but the long line of grey uniforms that filed through the streets, the “weary dreary minute guns,” and the dead bells clanging only added to his depression. Walking out into the country for relief he saw, ahead of him, a man who hurried along apparently in the grip of a terrible rage. A poor little kitten happened to be in the path of his violent footsteps. Reaching down, he brutally grabbed the defenceless animal, gouged out its eyes with his fingers and slung it to one side. This inhuman cruelty so outraged every fibre of Hearn's being that he dragged the pistol, which he had proudly bought for his journey, out of his pocket and fired at the man several times, but his marksmanship was so bad that no harm was done.

Hearn, very decidedly, did not like Memphis, his adventures had not begun cheerfully. However, the long expected steamboat at last arrived, and he was glad to shake the dust of Tennessee from his boots.





### III: He Comes to New Orleans, 1877-1887

SINCE 1718 when Le Sieur de Bienville, that illustrious French-Canadian soldier of fortune, founded New Orleans, she has welcomed to her bosom a ceaseless stream of adventurers of strange types and of men psychologically misfitted for the life to which they had been born. No country there was but sent its quota—France, Spain and England of course—as at one time or another the flag of each had flown over Louisiana in sign of possession, but less to be expected came a polyglot horde from China, Italy, Turkey, Sweden, Germany, Central Europe, the Malay Peninsula and even the Philippines. But never a stranger figure passed her portals than the small pathetic man who stood by the pilot of the *Thompson Dean* as she slapped her rear paddle wheel into New Orleans one November sunset of 1877.

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It was Lafcadio Hearn. A nondescript headcovering, halfway between a railroad conductor's and a yachting cap, crowned his five feet three inches of height. Its visor was pulled way down to hide, as much as possible, his mismated eyes, whose unnatural appearance was even more accentuated by a pair of spectacles of such tremendous magnifying power that they made them seem as goggly as those of a deep sea monster! He would have inspired a feeling of abhorrence if his remaining features had not cast about him a certain aura of diffident kindliness—he didn't look as if he could "hurt a cat." A shapely, hooked nose with thin well-cut nostrils, a clear olive skin and a sensitive mouth, shaded by a drooping brown moustache, made one forget the eyes, and, as he took off his cap to mop his brow, a broad high forehead gave him a look of refinement and mentality. His chest was remarkably large for a person of his size and made him look overbalanced. This appearance was emphasized by a dark double-breasted pea jacket, cut like a sailor's and worn so loose as to suggest a scarecrow. A very low collar, also too large, a flowing black tie and spring-bottomed pants coming down over small feet, carelessly shod, complete the catalogue—but, no, his hands, always so eloquent a detail, have been forgotten. They were small, beautifully shaped, sensitive, nervous, refined, well bred.

As he stood on his high point of vantage, twenty feet above the level of the river, and looked down toward the city, his nostrils began to quiver (as they always did when he became excited) and an expression of intense anticipation seemed to fire his whole personality. The odd-shaped blurs of colour moored along the river's edge and topped by their fuzzy pattern of crisscrossed lines



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(for that is all his defective vision permitted him to see), meant ships and the romance of a thousand ports. The patchwork purple behind spelled an unknown and strange city, picturesque and teeming with the possibilities of new adventure; the glowing gold and red of the sunset on the Mississippi flicked and fired his imagination; all these things together meant the chance to wipe the slate clean and to write his name large in the future. The gruelling monotony of newspaper drudgery, his bald, dingy surroundings, the terrible climate which he so abhorred, were all to merge forgotten into the lure and luxuriance, the colour and hot passions of a semi-tropical city. Under this happy environment his creative forces would surely give birth to the masterpiece of which he had always dreamed. He would make himself respected, admired—no longer would he be ostracized and slighted. Even the realization that all he owned in the world was a trifle over twenty dollars—a short-lived barrier to his notorious improvidence—could not damp his ardour.

Excitement, curiosity, anticipation boiling in his brain, he landed. How he found his way to the boarding house of Mary Bustillos at 228 Baronne Street<sup>1</sup> no one knows, but there it was that he spent his first night, and to her he wisely paid over his small supply of money as temporary insurance against his financial intemperance. This much he wrote to his old printer-friend, Watkin.

By no possible stretch of the imagination could he have stayed indoors on that first night. He must have wandered for hours through those dark, shadow-mysteried, gas-lit streets—streets that were so dangerous in those days, that it is a marvel he was not held up,

<sup>1</sup> The building at 228 Baronne still exists, the number is changed to 813.

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or worse, before he got back. Incontinent dreams of love liaisons of a tropical tempestuousness with phantom shapes of exotic beauty surely troubled the few hours of sleep that his impatience permitted him, and early morning found him once more started on his explorations.

Of course his stealthy, tentative footsteps—so characteristic of the nearly blind—must have led him to the Vieux Carré, that historical district which is the old New Orleans, bounded on its four sides by Canal and Rampart Streets, Esplanade Avenue and the river.

The mute evidences of the past domination of French and Spanish taste, which everywhere met his eye, delighted him and gave him a feeling of home. He was fascinated with everything he saw—the stern-faced houses, their plastered surfaces mellowed into iridescence by time and weather and a hundred underlying coats of vari-colored peeling paint, their only decoration hand-wrought balcony railings of simple, chaste design and large, gaily painted carriage doors leading into their vitals; the houses of a later date with their elaborate cast-iron balconies that threw shadows of intricate lace on the vermiculated walls; and the steep triangular roofs of the slave quarters at the back, looking like the bevelled edges of huge chisels stuck on end. Even the figures in the streets allured his imagination—the lady on her way to market with her small waist and insistent bustle, frequent frills and pancake hat, worn down in front and perked up in the back, accompanied by her smart mulatto maid, market-basket on arm, in “guiney-blue” dress, white kerchief and gaudy head-handkerchief; foreign sailors from every clime gawking through the streets; the old bottle-man, whose push

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cart was always decked with little American flags, bribing the children with cheap sweets to steal bottles; the dear old fat negro "mammy" whose capacious bosom had cradled the head of many a "white chile"—all these and a hundred others enchanted him. The impassive, secretive house-fronts inflamed his curiosity, and his heated imagination conjured strange hidden mysteries of life and passion. His questing step was stayed by every glimpse seen through the cool tunnel of the carriageway of some old mansion, of the palm-grown, flag-paved patio beyond, its dark green foliage turned to singing colour by happy flecks of yellow sunshine.

Thus he wandered through his new-found paradise until he came upon the French market. Here his seething enthusiasm boiled completely over as he bathed himself in sights and sounds and smells and colour. The roof—a covering for an entire irregular block, or "islet" as the Creoles called it—was supported by large, circular cement pillars of mottled buff, with awnings hung between them on the sunny side. In its shadow milled a horde of people, ant-like in their activity. The brilliant "tignons," worn on the heads of *mulâtresses*, with dull gold faces and crisp cotton aprons, wove intricate designs with the somber clothes of the vendors from Italy and Greece. The gay hues of patterned fruits and vegetables fought for supremacy with the primitive colours of the native dress of Choctaw Indian squaws, squatting on their blankets, their wares laid out before them: latanier root for use as scrubbing-brushes, Gombo filé, the powdered sassafras leaves so necessary in the concoction of that sovereign among soups, the Creole Gombo, plantains and "patte de chat," the infusion from which is sure cure for colds. Beside each squaw

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stood a huge wicker basket, head straps hanging, which she had used to freight her wares, and over its edge generally peered a stoic papoose face, topped by straight black hair and slit by two beady eyes. A babelish clamour of voices—Gombo, French, Greek, English and Dalmatian—all bargaining for their daily bread, hummed through the market. New and strange odours filliped his sense of smell, their pleasant effect destroyed at times by whiffs from the adjacent fish stalls. Over all these diverse scents rose one supreme—the perfume of coffee, wonderful Creole coffee. This must have drawn Hearn with the power of a magnet to the stall presided over by Rose Nicaud, a mulatress, dressed in the picturesque trappings of her class, whose coffee and common sense had made her known to all New Orleans and most of the Parishes. Here he exchanged a picayune for a cup of coffee and, as he drank, received his first lesson from Rose in the melodious “Gombo,” which is French as modified by African limitations, and because she was an authority in such matters, she probably explained to him the various intricate methods of tying the “Tignon de Madras” “à la Chinoise, à quatre bouts, à la Contesse,” and countless other ways.

Finally, loaded with new impressions, as a bee with honey, he returned to his boarding-house to unburden himself on paper. On the way he passed Jackson Square, known as the Place d’Armes under the French régime, and stopped a moment to enjoy that impossible prancing horse which supports the dashing figure of General Jackson, his chapeau in hand in perpetual politeness. The pattern which this dark statue and its adjacent palms made against the lavender-grey of the three-spired Saint Louis Cathedral charmed him; and



## He Comes to New Orleans

the Cathedral itself, flanked by its two splendid old Spanish buildings, had all the delightful unreality of the quaint painted back-drop of some theatre.

Only once more were his careful feet stopped as he hurried over the uneven banquette or slopped, at the crossings, through puddles whose bottoms were receptacles for rotting refuse—and this was when the rhythmically repeated *Boum, Boum* of a tom-tom came to his ear. Swift visions of weird African rites and savage dances leaped to his mind as he hastened toward the sound. It got louder and louder, more insistent—he turned a corner and saw—a white-haired old negro, cotton-bearded, solemnly thumping a drum with one stick, a red auction flag behind him. It was Colonel Girardy's old negro without whom no sale could have been properly held.

Reaching Baronne Street, he rushed to his room to write the first of that wonderful series of impressions of New Orleans that were later to appear in the *Cincinnati Commercial* under the pen name of "Ozias Midwinter" which he borrowed from a character in Wilkie Collins' "Armada."

The following days were, probably, the happiest he spent in New Orleans. He said: "There is such a delightful pleasantness about the first relations with people in strange places—before you have made any rivals, excited any ill-will, incurred anybody's displeasure. Stay long enough in any one place and the illusion is over." No material cares worried him; his twenty dollars had served to pay his board and lodging for a time. He drifted through the city absorbing new impressions as a desert does rain. The things he saw and heard and smelt and felt, he made to live again for the edification

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

of the readers of the Cincinnati *Commercial*. They, prosaic souls, did not realize that our country rocks along, equally well or badly, as you choose, under either political party, and they were more keenly curious about the outcome of the presidential recount than they were about the peculiarities of New Orleans. Hearn wrote of every subject other than the one they wished to hear about. He described the levees, the French market, the songs of the Negro-French dialect, the elevated tombs that looked like bake-ovens. He even retailed the ghost stories he heard—but not one word of politics.

The editors of the *Commercial* were dissatisfied and delayed the publication of these letters, likewise the pay therefor.

Here Hearn's bubble burst. No longer could he moon through the city finding new joys at every corner. The material things of life, to which he never gave a thought, once more held him prisoner. Mrs. Bustillos demanded her rent. Hearn was broke, dead broke. He temporized—his check from the *Commercial* would surely come to-morrow—just have patience—the usual sordid conversation under the circumstances. The flavour of New Orleans turned bitter in his mouth, and a hopeless discouragement descended upon him as had so often happened in Cincinnati and New York.

Looking for work he went to the *Democrat*. The editor, George Dupré, was surprised to see a shabby, little figure drift in and, laying a MS. on his desk, say, "How much will you give me for this?" Dupré glancing over the article quickly and astonished at its literary merit, said, "I'll give you ten dollars." The stranger took the money and disappeared. On reading it over again, more carefully, the editor took occasion to



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make certain minor changes before sending it up to the composing room. Early next morning the same man, but this time flaming with rage, rushed into the office and, flinging some bills in Dupré's face, spat out: "Here, take your dirty money! How dare you change my article—emasculate it?" Dupré started to explain, but the room was empty. Of course this method of behaviour did not make it any easier for Hearn to get work, but hunger forced him to continue his search.

During the first month of his happy-go-lucky wanderings he had met, in some way, Mr. John Dimitry, who was then the head of the board of education and locally famous as a writer; and it was this gentleman who gave him a letter of introduction to Major Wm. M. Robinson, the editor of the New Orleans *Republican*.

"OFFICE OF  
"DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION,  
"STATE OF LOUISIANA.

"New Orleans, November, 17th, 1877.

"Major Wm. M. Robinson,  
"Present.

"MY DEAR SIR:

"Permit me the pleasure of introducing to your courteous and friendly attention Mr. Lafcadio Hearn, who has recently come among us, on a visit. Mr. Hearn is the able correspondent of the Cincinnati *Commercial*. He seems enthused with the history (and the romance thereof) of our State. He is yearning to make that romance known to the West. He has asked me—an humble beginner in that romance—to furnish him with some details.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

"How can I—I who have but recently crossed the vestibule of the Temple—gratify Mr. Hearn?

"I run from the responsibility. I venture to leave you in the place, which I should (but couldn't) have filled;—you, my friend, so rich in your book-treasures; you, my friend, so generous in lending the knowledge which they have afforded you.

"Believe me, very faithfully, as ever,

"Yours,

"JOHN DIMITRY."

The Major, who had earned his title as a Northern officer, was a journalistic figure in those days, noted for his kindly interest in young newspaper men and it was quite in keeping with his character to invite Hearn to dinner at his house. He enjoyed it thoroughly and was particularly fascinated by the well-selected library, which served as a bond of sympathy between them. Other invitations followed and would have been more frequent if Hearn had been more considerate, but every time he went to the house, he and the Major stayed so late in the library, engrossed in books, that the very good dinner Mrs. Robinson had prepared was always ruined and this, of course, made him persona non grata with his hostess.

Later Hearn applied to Major Robinson for work, but the Major had to refuse. He was laying men off, not taking them on; business was dead and the city strangled by a terrible yellow fever epidemic. Hopeless, Hearn hunted a job always to be met by refusal after refusal. His failure to find work on any of the newspapers made him very bitter and he wrote, black-guarding them, to his friend Krehbiel, "I certainly

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would not advise you to write anything for a New Orleans paper. There is not a paper in the city capable or willing to pay for anything. There is not a Southern paper worth a d—n. There is hardly a first-class journalist on the staff of any paper here. The press of the city does not own its own soul; it is without life, individuality, courage, ability, enterprise, intelligence and even money. To send it any essay would be to fling a jewel into the sewer—to give Château Margaux to a dog,—to feed a buzzard with Charlotte Russe. For God's sake don't!" . . . "To send it to a New Orleans paper would be equivalent to feeding a big baboon with human brains." An opinion that was very much softened by his later success.

A nightmare of lean times followed, and the tangled trail of his sudden changes of abode, during the next six months, will probably never be unravelled. Boarding-house keepers, born to disappointment caused by delinquent lodgers, were forced by him to fulfil their predestination. He did not know in the morning where he would sleep at night and a five-cent meal often had to last two days. He was half-starved, hatchet-faced and browned—his hair became long and dank, his clothes shabbier and shabbier, until his shirt-tail showed through the seat of his pants. All his few superfluous possessions were turned into food through the medium of an Israelitish "Uncle," and he wrote the old printer, Watkin, for help, unavailingly, for Watkin, himself, was financially embarrassed.

As he loitered in the parks he made strange acquaintances among the other down and outers and those who lived by their wits. It was one of these "pals" who almost persuaded him to engage in a land scheme so pal-

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

pably dishonest that Hearn justified it by saying there was no money in honest work.

From time to time his interest in the city flamed up again and resulted in the writing of another "Ozias Midwinter" letter—a dissertation on Creole grammar, or an account of the wonderful names of the streets,—Humanity, de L'Amour, Rue des Bons Enfants, Madmen and Mystery, Virtue and Pleasure, Desire and Venus, or that famous Craps Street, through which so many of the devout were forced to make their way to church—that and a hundred others as strange.

He caught the dengue, or breakbone fever, which left him weak and seemed to impair the sight of his good eye. He discarded, probably to pawn them, the heavy spectacles he had worn on his arrival and never wore any again. Desperation finally compelled him to try stodgy political articles. He sent two to the *Commercial* in the hopes of placating that paper, but they were so badly done that some one else was engaged to do the Louisiana letter.

Everywhere he went on his weary wandering trying to kill time, he was met by evidences of yellow fever—the silence of the streets and lack of movement on the wharfs, the little squads of men pouring carbolic acid into the open gutters or the passing cotton floats stacked high with coffins dripping disinfectant. Everywhere from posts and door-jambs and fences fluttered the black-bordered death notices; Creole custom decreeing that deaths in the family should be so signalized. Some were in French and some in English; some only black-margined, others embellished by the figure of a widow in weeds sitting close to a tombstone, over which mourned a weeping willow—very lugubrious.

*Pamprato*



## DIED:

*Sunday April 11* at *6* o'clock *P.* M.  
*Maria Pamprato Belona*  
*Son. Mrs. & Mrs. Pamprato*  
age *2* years *6* months *—* days, a native of  
*La.* and a resident of *Mo.*  
*La.* for the past *Life* years.

The friends and acquaintances of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, which will take place *Monday April 12* at *—* o'clock *—* M. precisely, from the late residence of the deceased.

*1509 St. Philip St.*  
*Interments Metairie Cemetery*

Services to be held at  
without further notice.

New Orleans, *April 11* 191*5*

**S. VALENTI, 826 Toulouse Street.**



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As he sat on park benches reading discarded newspapers he saw nothing but yellow fever news, lists of deaths, new cases and cures, and ridiculous suggestions for controlling the epidemic. Dr. Faget aired his theories in three columns, extolling the beneficent power of smoke as a disinfecting agent and suggesting that every householder be forced by law to build a fire in his back yard for one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon. Doctors Bickham, Smyth, Choppin, Mitchell and Scott were so sure of their position that they put a paid advertisement in the *Item* reading:

"Cleanliness is Next to Godliness.

"We the undersigned, highly approve of perfect cleanliness, and fresh water bathing in the river, done judiciously, is desirable at all times."

Their position was impeccable as far as it went; but even though they were all medical men of standing, they knew nothing of yellow fever, so they hid their ignorance under a harmless endorsement of cleanliness. Quacks there were, however, a plenty who were not so modest and boldly advertised,

"The Yellow Fever Conquered."

"Experience in the Morbid Anatomy and Clinical Practice in thousands of cases of yellow fever in Mexico, Panama, etc.—" "never lost man, woman or child," "offer services with positive assurance of success, etc."

He read editorials that solemnly advised that onions should never be eaten during epidemics, because they

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absorbed the virus and so communicated the disease. They were of benefit, however, if sliced and placed in the sick room and changed every few hours as, on account of their absorbing quality, they lessened the fever of the patient. Another suggestion insisted that the only safe thing to do was to saturate your clothes with tar, but a natural suspicion attaches to the tailors of having had a hand in the circulation of this piece of advice. One also wonders whether the powder-maker had anything to do with the suggestion, which was actually carried out, that cannon be discharged morning and evening to break the fever.

He learned about the new cold water cure that Dr. Kibbe advocated. The "cure" which had an unbroken record for killing every patient upon whom it was tried. This did not shake the good doctor's faith, however, for when he caught the fever, he gamely insisted that "he take his own medicine." Accordingly Dr. Choppin, acting under his orders, had him taken to the hospital operating room after all the windows and doors had been thrown open. There the patient was laid out naked upon the table, packed with ice and sprinkled with ice water until his fever went down, whereupon he was taken back to his bed and died within twenty-four hours. The Doctor's death was really a boon, for it discredited his treatment for all time and so probably saved hundreds of lives. The papers were full of it.

What Hearn heard, saw and read of the handling of the epidemic gave him a very clear idea of the inefficiency of the politicians who were masquerading as health officers, and for the rest of his stay in New Orleans he attacked them unmercifully, at every opportunity, in the editorial columns. He summarized his

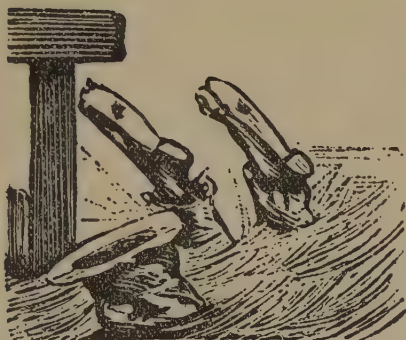
## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

opinion when he wrote Krehbiel that: "There is no news here except yellow fever and politics; and I don't know which is the greater curse, I prefer the fever." To Watkin, he wrote: "They sprinkle the streets here with water carts filled with carbolic acid, pour lime in the gutters, and make all the preparations against the fever possible, except the only sensible one of cleaning the stinking gutters and stopping up the pest holes. Politicians make devilish bad health officers. When I tell you that all the gutters are haunted by eels, whose bite is certain death, you can imagine how vile they are."

Hearn arrived in New Orleans in November. The winter had drawn its long sad procession of months across his consciousness and he had not made a cent. As he sat in the park sick, hungry, hopeless, half-blind and friendless, he laid down his newspaper with all its futile, monkey-like chatter of the epidemic and his mind turned to freeing himself of his sufferings. Suicide seemed the only escape. But how? Should he try to catch "yellow jack" and be carried to peace in one of those disinfectant-reeking pine boxes? No! He had nursed a chance friend through an attack of "Bronze John" and, although he had not caught it himself, the horror of it stuck, vivid in his mind. Should he blow out his brains? But if he had money enough to buy a revolver he could get food instead. Wouldn't it be easier to throw himself into the swift current of the Mississippi? But the look of the water, as it sucked and swirled black among the piles under the wharf, undermined his determination. These were the thoughts that constantly hammered in his brain. Seven months in New Orleans and Hearn was at the cracking point. He decided to make a last desperate visit to Major Robinson.

## THE FATAL PLUNGE.

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How calmly Big Muddy continues to flow !  
How fierce are the tortures I feel !  
Will a plunge in its depths release me from woe,  
And the book of my misery seal ?

Whatever betides, the plunge I must take ;  
The fiends and my woes urge me on :  
My hunger still gnaws, and my thirst I can't  
elake,  
And no one will weep when I'm gone.

My body is racked with the pangs of disease,  
And my soul I have soiled by neglect ;  
Opportunities wasted now urge me to steal  
From the life I have made such a wreck.

O dark river's depth ! if surcease I could find  
In the pulse of the infinite flow,  
How gladly the torture of body and mind  
In thy Lethean flood I'd forego.

But with terrible doubt and with terrible dread,  
And a body with rottenness rife,  
I plunge in alarm to the dark river bed  
To be free from the anguish of life.

This is a "poem" illustrated by Hearn which later appeared in the *Item*.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

At the office of the *Republican* his pathetic appearance melted the Major's heart and he said: "Mr. Hearn, a little newspaper started over here about a year ago and I heard they were short-handed; I'll take you over and introduce you to Mr. Bigney, the editor."

The illy-assorted couple started. The Major large, respectable, prosperous-looking. Hearn small, shabby, furtively pulling at the tail of his coat, trying to make it cover the sad deficit in the seat of his pants.

They made their way to the second floor of 39 Natchez Alley where a year previously eleven journeymen printers, out of jobs, had banded together to form a co-operative newspaper. The editors were Mark Bigney and Edwin L. Jewel and the modest name of the paper was the *Item*. June 11, 1877, had seen the start of their venture which had been a moderate success from the beginning, as was evidenced by the fact that when they divided up the profits of their first week each received the enormous sum of \$2.65.

Mark Bigney was a giant of a man—over six feet tall and heavy in proportion—but with all his size he was (as one of his old associates expressed it) "as gentle as a woman, kind and courteous to every one." He was an average poet and had already published a small book of verse.

It was to this gentleman that Major Robinson introduced Hearn on that memorable day in June, 1878.

Said the Major: "Mr. Bigney, I've brought you round a man after your own heart; you're a literary fellow and he's a literary fellow too."

Hearn, shrinking with embarrassment, shook hands with the Colossus and, when his experience on the two big dailies of Cincinnati became known, he was then and



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there made a member of the *Item's* staff and started to work as assistant-editor—salary \$10 per week. This was a terrible reduction in pay from Cincinnati days, but it had its compensations. He had sworn that never again would he be a slave to a newspaper and work fourteen hours on a stretch. Now he could arrive at the gentlemanly hour of ten and leave at one.





#### IV: *Item* Days

HIS duties, at least at first, were light in comparison with those to which he had been accustomed in Cincinnati. He wrote one or two leaders on foreign politics or literary subjects; scanned the New York dailies for ideas for the next day's editorials, wrote in its final form the telegraph news and finally clipped a column of crop notes from the strange papers published in the Parishes (as the counties of Louisiana are called). The names of these journals were as quaint as their format—*The Jefferson Jimplecute*, *Pointe Coupee Pelican*, *Natchitoches Vindicator*, *The Sugar Bowl of Louisiana*, *Le Meschacebe*, and *Le Courier de la Louisiane*. Most of them were either bilingual or entirely in French as, anomalous as it may seem in these United States, many of the Parishes were populated by a citizenry so Gallic

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that practically all spoke French and less than half of them any English at all.

It was about June 15, 1878, that Hearn started work, and from then on the whole atmosphere of the paper began to insensibly change. From a little hide-bound sheet never publishing anything but items of strictly local interest, it began reaching out and became catholic in its tastes—as catholic as Hearn. Paragraphs, clipped from foreign journals about political or literary celebrities, Chinese proverbs, notes on Oriental customs or Greek dress or Moslem Art, began to give colour and life to what had hitherto been an arid intellectual desert.

Hearn's first contribution had been very typical. He regarded the New Orleans press as hopelessly provincial and, in addition, had developed a personal rancour against them because they had refused him work. This feeling festered and he could not forgo the opportunity for revenge. So, in his first editorial, headed "Genuine Journalism," he forcefully and sanely laid down his theories as to the "true functions of a daily journal" and then launched a pitiless attack on the short-comings of his rival papers—the *Picayune*, the *Times* and the *Democrat*—saving his praise, very characteristically, for the two foreign-language newspapers—*L'Abeille*, published in French, and the German *Gazette*. Then, just to give them a sample of his prowess, he published in the same issue the first instalment of his translation of Theophile Gautier's "The Mummy's Foot." This was one of the translations that he had so carefully polished and repolished during his odd moments in Cincinnati. It had kept all the colour mystery and warmth of the original and met with the same success in New Orleans that Gautier's story had achieved in France; and, quite

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naturally, because New Orleans was almost as Latin in her tastes, sympathies and psychology as Paris. This reception encouraged him to continue and so, from time to time, he published other French translations. Later he was able to add delightful retellings of Spanish and South American legends.

His contributions to the *Item* furnished the most minute picture of every mental reaction he experienced. Each new interest, change of taste or even irritation, appeared as plainly as if it had been possible to take a continuous psychological movie of his brain.

The *Times* printed a pirated rehash of some of his descriptions of New Orleans that had come out in the *Cincinnati Commercial* and the next day there appeared in the *Item* a scathing arraignment under the title, "Editorial Stealing."

His friend Krehbiel wrote him that with the help of Char Lee, the old Chinaman they had both known, he had staged a Chinese play and given a lecture on Chinese music, assisted by a native orchestra. This inspired an editorial on "Romanticism in Music" which shows a surprising amount of information about racial melody and pays some very pretty compliments to Krehbiel.

"Philosophy of Imaginative Art" and "American Art Tastes" reflect his sound theories on art, and his irritation against bad taste is clearly seen in a little pun shoved, without rhyme or reason, between two editorials—"Hanging is too good for a 15 cent chromo." Unfortunately, however, he undermined his reputation, a little later, by recommending in dead earnest, "Moresque Architecture for River Steamboats."

Even the wanderlust that continually harried him crept into the editorial column and he indulged in

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“Meditations upon Vacations.” “Or again instead of calm, the wilder pleasures of rapid travel,—a steam flight to some Spanish-American city with antiquated fortifications and the life of dead centuries and women with skins of the color of gold;—a trip to some island in the Caribbean Sea; a week of *far niente* among monkey-haunted trees and woods shrill with parrot calls. Delicious.”

All his life he had been the under-dog; often the tin can of social disapproval had been tied to his tail, so what was more natural than for him to take up the cudgels for the weak and oppressed and engage, with all the enthusiasm of a Don Quixote, in almost daily editorial tilts against Police extortion and inefficiency, white slavery, child labour, gang-rule, the opium vice and the over-working of employés.

### OFFICERS OF THE LAW.



How some of our constables serve  
wri s of ejectment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of Hearn's illustrations from the *Item*.



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

His first experience in the fever-ridden city had implanted in him the heartiest contempt for the inadequacy of "those politicians masquerading as a Board of Health" and he waged a continuous, vitriolic warfare against them, in an effort to have the unbelievably insanitary conditions of the city remedied.

At that time each house had its individual cess-pool, and the functions to-day performed by miles of mazed sewers and elaborate disposal plants were then discharged, below Canal Street, by one little fat man, "Zizi Bidonier" (Zizi the Bucketeer, as the Creole children called him), who went from house to house assisted by a thin bucket line of decrepit old men and a few covered wagons. In the face of conditions as primitive as these it is needless to say Hearn's efforts were impotent, but he accepted defeat in one direction only to continue the battle in another. Lepers were allowed to walk unmolested through the streets—even the busiest of all, Canal Street,—it had always been the custom. The enormity of such a practice roused him to launch a campaign for their segregation and, in a series of strong direct editorials, which gave evidence of a surprising amount of medical reading, he pointed out the ghastly danger of permitting them to mix freely with the populace.

It was discouraging work and, sometimes, his irritation at the slovenly, criminally, benighted way in which the city was run in all its departments, found vent in such biting paragraphs as the following:

"In China they have the Street of the 18,000 Grandmothers, the Street of the Innumerable Virtues, the Street of the 17,000,000 Dragons. But

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they have not got the Street of the 19,000 Dogs, or the Street of the Invisible Policeman, or the Street of the 30,000 Stinks. Such names are more appropriate to civilized cities.”<sup>1</sup>

Municipal politics could not monopolize his pen for long, however, and he often turned to a consideration of national problems such as—“The Chinese Question in the West,” “Lynching and Law Making,” “Concealed Weapons,” “The Apotheosis of the Negro,” “Mormon Mummery” or “The Failure of Strikes.”

In dealing with the question of “Woman Suffrage” he predicted its ultimate success, but, at the same time, based a gentle protest against its advisability upon grounds that were undoubtedly suggested by personal weakness. He said:

“The advent of women to the exercise of political power could only result in corrupting politics more than they could ever be corrupted under a régime of masculine rule. A beautiful woman owns a power superior to reason, to conviction, to faith, to fear, to patriotism to principle—the power of sex, the faculty of fascination.

“It is to prevent the exercise of that power in the interest of evil that the advent of women to the political arena is gently but firmly opposed. It is useless to observe that there would be a counterbalancing of influence in the new element of governing power. A beautiful but wicked woman will effect more mischief in one week than a dozen equally beautiful but virtuous women could undo in a lifetime.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wayside Notes, *Item*.

<sup>2</sup> “Woman Suffrage,” the *Item*, June 19, 1879.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

It is quite evident that the "burnt child dreaded the fire."

But notwithstanding this he gathered courage to deal with the query, "Shall Women Smoke?"<sup>1</sup> Again is his prediction right, for he said they would, but calls attention to the fact that nations where both sexes smoke, Turkish, Oriental and Spanish, are on the road to decay.

His sensitive nature abhorred cruelty to man or beast and this antipathy showed itself in campaigns aimed at the practice of cock-fights, dog-fights, pigeon shoots and vivisection. He just as valiantly tilted against governmental extravagance and wastefulness, although he was, personally, as careless of economy as a tom-cat is of table manners. His soft-heartedness coupled with his ideas of Federal thrift made him logically a Pacifist and he agitated the question of disarmament both on humanitarian and economic grounds. In one of these editorials appears a very prophetic paragraph:

"There is however an axiom that there is no effect without a cause; and it is generally acknowledged that nothing exists without a purpose. There is reason to fear that the prodigious armies and terrific navies of Europe exist for some grimmer purpose than that of keeping each other in mutual check. Such vast preparations for war do not generally herald a lasting peace. Millions of Krupp guns and billions of rifles are not likely to remain idle for ever—although a war between any of the great Powers would have a fearful effect upon the commercial prosperity of the world at large."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Item*, October 6, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> The *Item*, "Future War," November 6, 1881.

## Item Days

Hearn continued to be an apostle of peace, but was finally forced to the unwelcome conclusion that war can never cease altogether as,

“The sociologist has discovered a law in the periodicity of war. War is an epidemic, a disease of society, a regular purgation, a source of soil fertilization, a compulsory return to the earth of elements wrested from it by agriculture, a healthy dysentery that purifies national blood. There is certainly a recognized necessity for war,—moral and physical. Von Moltke has told us what the moral necessity is, historians have told us what the material benefit to the soil is. Moreover war is a check to over-increase of population. From time immemorial nations have saved themselves from famine by self-decimation in war. This fact is being more and more recognized by philosophers; and the more we improve our appliances of destruction by military science, the more war becomes difficult and expensive, the more certain we may be that its necessities and results will always be the same. Suppose that a war at some future epoch should only occur once in a hundred years, then we may feel satisfied that such a war will be comparatively more destructive than those of a less peaceful era, in which wars occur almost annually. For the law of war seems to be like that of the distribution of heat upon the surface of the earth;—we always receive just the same quantity, whether the summers be cool or the winters warm.”

Other international questions interested him as well and, because he read most of the French periodicals which kept him thoroughly “au courant” with the polit-

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

ical situation in Europe, he was enabled to express an editorial opinion on such very diversified topics as "An Indo-Russian War," "Bismarck's Views," "Nihilism," "Pessimism in Socialism," "Dahomey and the Dahoman War" or "The Depopulation of Circassia."

It appears an endless task to give the full colour and complete variety of his contributions, for his mind, turned by the multiplicity of his prejudices and predilections, seemed to create as many different patterns as a child's kaleidoscope. It is only by piecing together a sort of patchwork quilt of "Odds and Ends" of his articles that it has been possible to give even a glimmering. And yet some few patches still remain so gaily coloured that they force their mention—"The Camel's Hump," a base attack on bustles and a plea for a return to the simplicity and beauty of Greek dress—"Forty-four Years a Queen," a sketch of Queen Victoria—"A Paris Mystery"—"How Illustrious Men Marry"—"Nightmare and Nightmare Legends," in which is displayed a most surprising knowledge of folklore of both ancient and modern countries—"Spanish as a Commercial Language"—"Face Studies"—"Self-Supporting Wives"—"Color Blindness"—"Nudity and Nonsense"—"Invisible Poisons," a description of the new bacteriological discoveries, "Opium Eating" and "The English Nobility." He even tried to explain the sex attraction, that ceaselessly held sway over him, as a question of "Human Electricity" and said that it would probably be discovered in future that "the principle of light and life and thought and motion, is electricity," and that the same force is accountable for "the strange physical attraction between persons of opposite sexes who, although meeting only for a moment, feel



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as if those invisible threads of gold whereof Lucian wrote, were drawing their hearts together. And the magical perfume of a curl, the thrilling touch of a hand, the breeze of silk impregnated with the odour of youth, the silver witchery of a voice, the echo of a step that the heart stops to listen to, the peachiness of a cheek that fills the mouth with the waters of longing,—do not all these sweet mysteries need some electrical theory to elucidate them?"

In Cincinnati the macabre had exerted a baleful fascination over Hearn's imagination and, while the greater success and comfort of living which he achieved in New Orleans modified its influence to a certain extent, evidences of this morbidity still continued to crop up. While he was in the midst of waging sane and helpful campaigns to secure civic improvements we find him, time and time again, handling with a certain unhealthy avidity, such questions as "Body Snatching," various gruesome methods of execution and strange details of executioners.

He seemed to have had an unnatural callousness about anything sufficiently gruesome to whet his unhealthy appetite, but it had to be bizarre as well—the type of thing which appears in the following paragraph, culled from one of his columns.

"The *Lafayette Courier* has been making a fuss about a medical student who dug up a Cincinnati belle from her last resting place and made a pair of good comfortable slippers out of her opaline skin. Perhaps some time in the twentieth century all this sort of squeamishness will have died out; and people will begin to utilize human skin instead of con-

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demning it to rot uselessly in the ground. It might be put to a variety of uses. We have seen a book said to be bound in human skin which looked very neat. Human skin has been used at various epochs of history for saddles, for drums, for the lining of shields; and it is not very long since the newspapers published the will of a certain eccentric Yankee containing a provision to the effect that the corpse of the deceased be flayed, 'and the skin made into a drum head, and that Yankee Doodle be played thereon every Fourth of July at sunrise in the shadow of Bunker Hill monument.' ”<sup>1</sup>

Of all these unhealthy predilections, suicide seemed to haunt him most; the thought of it had so often cankered his mind that it left an indelible bias. Every time statistics on deaths due to this cause appeared in any of the European papers to which he subscribed, they were sure to reappear in the *Item*. Every time there was a spell of bad weather some such musing could generally be found in "Odds and Ends." ”<sup>2</sup>

"The recent gloomy weather caused much physical depression, and probably accounts for the suicides which took place the other day. Suicides seldom occur on cheerful, bright days; and probably also the commission of crime is influenced to no small degree by climatic changes. Men often fancy themselves to be unfortunate and miserable when they are only sick; and the mind appears to be largely affected by the condition of the body. Were medical science applied to history in a certain manner, we might be astonished to discover

<sup>1</sup> The *Item*, "Odds and Ends," August 10, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> *Item*, "Odds and Ends," August 24, 1879.

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how much human events have depended upon the condition of royal stomachs and imperial livers."

He published a squib called "Morbid Suicide," and also translated from the French a story called "My Own Suicide." One editorial in particular shows that he must have kept a very careful record of every scrap of information on his obsession that he garnered. He called it—

### "SOME SUICIDE NOTES"<sup>1</sup>

"Looking over a number of old newspapers the other day in order to obtain some particulars regarding the death of an old acquaintance, we were struck by the peculiarly American manner in which several suicide-sensations that attracted our attention were written.

"The American reporter almost always details the circumstance of the act itself in some such manner as:

"'Placed a small silver-mounted Smith & Wesson to his temple and fired';

"Or, 'The weapon used by the deceased was a fine Lafancheux. The ball ranged downward through the heart and death was instantaneous';

"Or, 'Beside the deceased was lying a Webblly revolver, about .48 calibre';

"Or, 'The unfortunate man placed the muzzle of a navy Colt in his mouth and fired';

"Or, 'The revolver used was a fine English Tran-tor; and the brains of the deceased were scattered and splattered around the room.'

"Yet odd as it may appear to give such impor-

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, November 28, 1880.

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tance to the description of the weapon used, it is really a matter in which the public are interested, and the reporter is quite right in reporting it as he does. People who hear of a man shooting himself, and who know anything about revolvers or pistols feel considerable curiosity to know whether the act of self-destruction was committed with 'a small single-barrelled steel pistol' or 'a pistol of the bulldog pattern,' or 'a Derringer' or a 'Remington revolver,' etc. For a country in which so large a number of people own fire-arms, each man of experience has a special affection for some one variety of revolver or pistol, respect for several others, and contempt for a large number. The good taste of the man who shoots himself with a \$75 Trantor will be appreciated years after his death; the memory of a man who uses a Colt will be respected; the foreigner who uses a fine French or Belgian revolver to kill himself will be spoken of with an approving nod; but the wretch who shoots himself with 'a small single-barrelled steel pistol' or a \$4 revolver bought for \$1 at a pawn shop, will soon be forgotten, or even if remembered will be spoken of with contempt. There is an aristocracy even in suicide. And there is an artistic taste in the choice of weapons.

"It is said,—we know not on what authority—that several arms-manufacturing companies keep a species of suicide-statistics, showing the preference of suicides for one weapon over another. This is somewhat doubtful. But if it could be done, it would prove little more than that the annual sales of certain manufacturers are larger than those of others. Probably the finest revolvers and the poorest are most used by suicides; while the medium

class of weapons are comparatively exempt from such usage. We only infer this because sensational suicides with revolvers are usually committed by young spendthrifts who have been rich or by unfortunate strugglers with the world who are very poor. The latter are glad to obtain a pistol for any sum they can scrape together; the former often have something exceedingly fine in the way of a weapon—a remnant of their fortune—a delicate and valuable instrument of death confined in a velvet-lined case. These are only suppositions, of course; but suppositions founded on facts. The persons who commit suicide with revolvers constitute a distinct—and perhaps the most respectable—class of masculine suicides. When the statistic collectors shall give fuller details than at present in regard to suicides there will probably be some curious revelations on this subject.

“One cannot help wondering whether the artisans who make these weapons do not sometimes fancy that No. 273,221 may save a good life by destroying a worthless one, or that No. 273,222 may be the instrument of some frightful drama of jealousy, or that No. 273,223 might pass successfully through the hands of a merchant, a clergyman, a thief, a traveller, a gambler, a pawnbroker, a policeman,—to become at last, after innumerable peregrinations, the momentary property of a *felo-de-se* to be taken charge of by the coroner until the friends of the deceased are heard from.”

A gradual mutation of this morbid psychosis began to take place. An uncanny description of people who talked to themselves in the streets marked this change, and, with it, a definite turning point in Hearn's literary



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life. In this article his early taste for the macabre appears sublimated and, for the first time, raised from the objective recital of actual, revolting, physical details (as in the "Tan Yard Case") to the realm of the subjective. Influenced, doubtless by Poe, he tried to weave an atmosphere of haunting horror without actually parading the *corpus delicti*. It was called

### "THE CITY OF DREAMS"<sup>1</sup>

"Then came the burning summer and its burning scourge of fever;—under the raw, merciless, dizzy sunlight, and the pitilessly clear infinite of warm blue above, the mutterers still wandered the silent streets, seeking out the bits of shadow, as Arab oases in a world of yellow sand,—and they talked more than ever to themselves and to the shadows, to the vast void above and to the whispering trees that drooped in the heat.

"So the months rolled dryly and fiercely by, the sun rose each day with the same glory of angry heat; and the sky glowed each evening with the glare of molten brass. And the talkers became fewer; but they seemed to talk more than they ever had before done. They talked to the black streamers that fluttered weirdly at the handles of muffled bells, and to ghostly white things hung to cottage doors, and to the long processions that rumbled ominously toward the Places of Tombs.

"Sometimes it seemed that one heard a sound of sobbing,—stifled sobbing; as if a man were swallowing a bitter grief with bitter determination—but this was perhaps imaginary; for there were so

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, March 9, 1879.

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many strange sounds in that strange summer that none could well trust his ears.

“The summer waned; and yet it seemed at last as though the number of those who talked to invisible things became greater. They *did* become greater in number. There was no doubt of it remaining before the first cold wind came from the far North, boisterously and wild as if suddenly freed from some Arctic enchanter. And the number of the mysterious ones waxed greater.

“Then at intervals their words fell upon our ears; and it seemed that the character of them had undergone a change,—no longer expressing ideas of wealth. They had ceased to speak in our hearing of money. They spoke of the dead,—and muttered remembered words uttered by other tongues,—and asked information from waving shadows and white walls, regarding people that God only knows anything about.

“Perhaps they remembered that the only witness of some last interview were the same white walls and waving shadows. And the shadows lay there at just the same angle,—well perhaps the angle was a little sharper,—and they were waving just as dreamily as then. And perhaps a time might come when all Shadows that have been must answer all questions put to them.

“Seeing and hearing all these things, we somehow ceased to marvel that some people dwelling in the city of New Orleans, should speak mysteriously and hold audible converse with their own thoughts; forasmuch as we, also, dreaming among the shadows, spoke aloud to our own hearts, until awakened by an echo of unanswered words.”

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Much practice had given Hearn an almost perfect technique in the creation of an eerie atmosphere and now, into this background, he introduced the theme of love, but always of a tragic character. This last addition was a concession to his sex complex which, always insistent, could no longer be denied in his work. Interweaving these two elements Hearn developed a type of exotic storiette to which he gave the generic name of "Fantastics," and, in their particular field, they have never been rivalled. They were his subtle impressions of the strange life of New Orleans—his "dreams of a tropical city," illusory and unsubstantial, made only sufficiently concrete to rouse, in the reader, the same emotional reactions that had inspired them—they were haunting episodes, strung together by two threads—the twin idea of Love and Death. But there were other facets to Hearn's versatility.

. . . . .

It has come to be the common belief that the "daily feature column" is the latest development of modern newspaper practice; that it was born of the need felt by the huge journals of to-day, of some personal touch with which to warm their chill institutionalism; and that, in the effort to fill the void left by the extinct country editor who knew every subscriber by his first name, men and women were employed to write these columns who supplied the necessary human element by the very intimacy with which they gave advice to subscribers or exposed in cold print the most personal details of their own daily existence, family life and mental reactions. But this "common belief" has no more foundation in fact than so many others, for Hearn was the peer of any of the present tribe of "columnists" and knew

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and used every trick of their trade. They complain of the labour of running one column—Hearn kept five going, sporadically.

It was in "Our Book Table" that the articles appeared, having the most lasting literary interest. In this column and among the editorials, he published a remarkable series of book reviews and literary criticisms. He had all the essentials necessary for this—a consuming passion for and curiosity about books, in leash to a judicial quality of mind that kept his criticism discriminating and fair, and, equally important, he possessed the courage to express his opinions without reserve. His judgments were, if anything, too frank for the good of the advertising department. His ardent admiration for the polished perfection of the French Romantic School made it impossible for him to condone literary slovenliness, in any form, and consequently he resented very much being forced to review books he considered unworthy. In one review he could not control his disgust and burst out with: "The author's English is terrible, terrible. We have already given more attention to 'Under the Willows' than it is worth and sincerely hope to be relieved hereafter from the misery of examining any more novels by the same writer."<sup>1</sup>

Evidently a publisher wrote to Hearn objecting to some such review and the letter so enraged him that he inserted an announcement in the next issue of his paper which is a perfect statement of the relationship which should exist between newspapers and book-reviews:

### "OUR BOOK TABLE

"(The *Item* will not hereafter notice fourth-rate novels, stupid volumes of poetry, and whatever is

<sup>1</sup> "Our Book Table," *Item*, July 23, 1879.

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generally termed 'Trash' in more than one line if at all.)

"With a daily paper the literary department is a news department. It is the medium through which the public is informed as to what good books are for sale and where they may be obtained. We do not consider as an item of any news value, the announcement that a worthless novel is for sale, and we take this opportunity of requesting publishers and booksellers not to send us any more trash."

On the other hand where books were of any literary worth Hearn reviewed them with enthusiasm, a sympathetic appreciation of good technique and a sound literary discernment as to values. While he noticed some American authors such as John Greenleaf Whittier, Bayard Taylor, Bret Harte and Poe (for whom he had the most unbridled admiration); still he dealt, for the most part, with those of the French school of which he was such an ardent disciple, and it is this enthusiasm which makes his opinions so interesting.

"Since the birth of the Romantic movement, the French language has acquired a warmth of color, a strength of utterance, a depth of feeling, a flexible grace and ornate perfection which no other modern tongue can approach. Victor Hugo, Lamartine, de Musset, Baudelaire, Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Gerard de Nerval, Taine—poets, novelists, historians, thinkers,—have with their followers created a new vocabulary and revived the antique sentiment of beauty—the worship of form and color. In fantastic creation, French literature has surpassed within the last quarter of a century all that has



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been done before, and realized the most chimerical dreams of the enthusiasts who revived it."

Naturally he resented the wane of this school and the substitution, in popular favour, of a group whose aim it was to picture every sordid detail with camera-like fidelity; but he had to admit finally, that, "The Romantic School proper,—which atoned for all its sins by creations of unspeakable beauty and purity,—is dead." "The realistic school is growing larger and larger and exhibiting a malignancy of the immoral spirit never equalled before in the history of modern civilization."

The particular tendencies of the realists, with which he found most fault, become especially distinct in his criticisms of some of Zola's books. Writing on "Le Ventre de Paris,"<sup>1</sup> he says:

"It is certainly a most extraordinary book; but its uniqueness is its most remarkable feature. It is a vivid painting of a life unfamiliar to the better classes of French society;—the life of the fish-mongers and poultry-sellers and butchers of Paris. Like *L'Assomoir* it has an odour,—not the stench of drunkenness and vomiting, but the smell of fish-booths and poultry cages transferred to paper. It is not a pleasing study in itself, although astonishingly clever; it is an abnormal piece of literature, and curious because abnormal. You cease the perusal of *L'Assomoir* with a bad taste in your mouth, a headache, a feeling of nausea at the stomach and a sense of anger and disgust at the writer who has displayed such ingenuity in sickening his readers. You terminate '*Le Ventre de Paris*' with

<sup>1</sup> "The Markets of Paris," *Item*, November 20, 1879.

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a feeling of relief and a desire to go out into the bright sun and clear air, as if you had been confined too long in the heavy and unpure air of a fish market. The thread of the story is ingeniously wrought; but it is a very unhappy and improper one and worthy of the unpleasantness of the background. You soon forgot the intricacies of the narrative, but the pictures of the market you cannot forget; the smell of decomposing fish and of dirty chicken pens is more difficult to banish than the recollection of a billingsgate broil in the market. Probably Zola could write a very clever book about the sewers of Paris. He writes with an ink which smells of such subjects."

Hearn's delicate and highly developed esthetic sense was so brutalized and outraged by Zola's procession of scabrous details that his literary honesty forced from him this cry of disapprobation, even though he had admitted elsewhere that "Zola is beyond all question one of the greatest novelists who ever lived."

For the so-called Southern novel he had only contempt and his opinion was summed up by "gushy—floriated English." "Written in bad taste—wishy washy trash." But from this general condemnation he excluded three Louisiana authors, Charles Gayarré, Alfred Mercier and George Cable.

He predicted (and his judgment has since been vindicated) that the majority of the American novelists of 1870's and 80's would cease to be read after two or three years, because, as they were all products of the same environment, social influence and education, they described only one strata of society—"the Fifth Avenue drawing-room type." Their predominant weakness, he thought,

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was that they did not attempt to find material in other walks of life, or portray distinct local or national characteristics.

When it came to the question of the novel in general he arrived at the remarkable conclusion that "the more perfect the novel of to-day, the more truthful must it be as the reflection of actual life."<sup>1</sup> Strange that to-day, thirty-two years after he voiced it, this literary axiom is being worshipped as never before; and even stranger is it that Hearn, in all his writings, was never able to follow his own advice—"actual life" being the one thing that he was powerless to come to grips with, either in his books or in his existence.

He reached his highest point as a literary essayist in his handling of the question of sex in literature. Sex complexes completely controlled his life,—in fact he was a strange combination of an illassible, masculine, physical passion married to a mentality that, in refinement and sensitiveness, was almost feminine, and so this particular subject had such an especial appeal that he treated it "con amore." This editorial throws such a blare of light upon his own literary ideals that it must be quoted in its entirety:

### "THE SEXUAL IDEA IN FRENCH LITERATURE"<sup>2</sup>

"It would be impossible in the brief space allotted to an article intended only to interest readers during a few moments' leisure in the afternoon, to give the least idea of the relative merits of contemporary French literature,—nor is an evening paper the proper medium for such an expression of opinion;

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, "The Value of Novels," January 23, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> *Item*, June 17, 1881.

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but in view of the general interest which modern French literature is exciting the world over, and the enormous production of contradictory criticism provoked by it, we may certainly hazard a few remarks about one general and striking characteristic of the Parisian school of modern fiction which does not appear to have been much touched upon by Anglo-Saxon critics.

“If this literature be the most dainty and beautiful in the world, the most artistic in conception and execution, in outline and shading, in form and color, in realism or idealism,—it is owing in no small degree to the fact that all of such art, whether of literature or painting, of sculpture or decoration, is influenced by a sexual idea little comprehended by those not of the Latin race. ‘L’Eternal Feminin’ appears in the idea of a novel as well as in the shapeliness of a bronze; the ‘odor di femina’ impregnates everything artistic produced by the magic of Paris. The idea of love, not spiritual or vague, but love as warmly material, as sharply defined as the old Hellenic idea of passion, is there omnipresent as an atmosphere tinting all it touches and penetrates. Such passion seeks a real object unveiled,—it tears away any drapery that does not antique-wise reveal as through a mist or by a suggestive falling of folds, the charms concealed; the old Greek love of physical nudity being partly revived in the modern French love of what might be termed psychical nudity,—the nakedness of passion seeking passion without concealment, and as if it were the most natural thing in the world. No winner of the Pythian or Isthmian prize ever exhibited his unclad body with more pride than the modern French writer lays bare the physical electric mechanism of pas-

sion. Nay, he goes further, lifting up fibre after fibre of the heart, as though working at a dissecting table; impulses of imagination, influences of circumstances upon passional excitement, philosophy of cause and effect, action of violent sentiment upon character,—all these are studied with a certain terrible precision which suggests the steely nerve of a surgeon gained by long familiarity with what others fear to touch. Passion is the mighty electricity which vibrates through all human life and causes all grand vibrations in its flood; it is again the power which creates the music of the instrument, which guides the chisel and the brush, which directs the witchery of the pen. This is to some extent the modern Latin idea; it is the old Greek idea also in a modern garb,—Aphrodite à la Parisienne! We Northern races still adore Odin and Thor. In Anglo-Saxon, or German or Scandinavian or American life, passional feeling is merely an incident,—a tiny spark hardly distinguishable in its surroundings; it is rather a consequence than a motive. But with the warm-blooded Latins, it is a motive rather than the consequence; to them the relation of passion to life is that of the spark placed in a vase of alabaster all illumined by its presence. Read an English or American novel of the best class; it is a mere report of facts and fancies in which love only appears as a drop of flavour sprinkled upon an otherwise vapid dish. It is even then a very weak flavour,—hardly perceptible to the palate. But in a fine French romance, passion is the motive and its consequence, the effect as well as the cause, the dish as well as its flavour,—the beginning and the end of all; and the least drop of that flavour has the intoxicating sweetness of



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Persian rose-essence. Paris has been called atheistic, but is rather pantheistic, *L'Eternel Feminin* is there the all in all,—a veritable Alpha and Omega,—a feminine Brahma. Such eyes behold all nature languid with passion; even in inanimate objects create amorous fancies, the clouds suggest aerial love, the trees have a feminine grace, the hills own voluptuous curves 'like the hips of a woman.'

"It was such a feeling among the ancient Greeks that produced all their most splendid virtues and talents; and the French art sentiment is to the modern world what that of the Greeks was to the ancient. All that is most tender, most graceful, most loveable; all that is most bewitching, sympathetic, exquisite in modern art has sprung from this source. It would be almost enough to make one believe in the worship of Venus, were we not only too well assured that the source of this art is as dangerous among the moderns as among the ancients; it produces fruit indeed as fair as those of the gardens of the Hesperides, but as foul also as those borne by that mystic Oriental tree, whose roots reach into the depths of Hell and the fruit of whose branches are the heads of devils.

"One grand result of this passional feeling is visible, however, in another branch of French literature altogether, whereof we can in this brief article cite only one divine example,—Michelet, the historian. We doubt if any man, unfettered by prejudice and superstition, could read Michelet without feeling better and nobler and purer afterwards. Michelet is the historian of Sexual Affection. He has analyzed history with the chemicals of human love. He has shown the result of repression upon

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legitimate passion through periods of centuries;—and perhaps the great secret of the Middle Ages has never been so fully and so boldly, certainly not as skilfully told as in ‘*La Sorciere*.’ We might cite hundreds of examples from his ‘*History of Rome*,’ his ‘*Women of the Revolution*,’ his ‘*Bible de l’Humanite*’—in which there is a wonderful paper on Solomon’s Canticle,—his ‘*History of France*,’ to illustrate the peculiar value of his extraordinary application of sex philosophy to historical enigmas. Almost wherever the English language is spoken, translations of his ‘*Love*’ and ‘*Women*’ are read with the best results. But Michelet felt the spirit of passion impregnating all Nature like the ‘*Soul of the World*’; he studied its results even microscopically; and looked at the life of birds and fishes and insects with new eyes. After perusing his works, ‘*La Mer*,’ ‘*L’Oiseau*,’ ‘*L’Insects*’—especially, perhaps the last, in which we read so wonderful a history of the republican ants and monarchical bees, one feels the great tenderness of the man to all living creatures entering into himself. A friend told us not very long ago that, after reading the book, he could never find courage to kill either an ant or a spider.”

There could be no more frank exposition of Hearn’s fixed conviction that the fountain head of all Art is Sex; and in view of this theory, it is truly remarkable that he never wrote anything (with the possible exception of a few of the earlier *Fantastics*) in which a passionate love supplied the main theme. Yet the explanation is simple, nevertheless. Hearn’s taboos were not those of his public. His mind seethed with lubric fan-

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tasies and his poor eyesight often permitted his imagination to clothe the veriest cinderwench with an exotic allure and a sensuous beauty which she never could have possessed. This very ability to fabricate an atmosphere would have aided him enormously to accomplish what he itched to do—write of the interplay of sex—the amorous incident presented in the polished, passionate manner of the great French masters whom he worshipped. Given their perfect freedom of choice of subject and treatment, he undoubtedly would have left a literary fame as great as any of the foremost French Romanticists.

But Hearn was a victim of his environment; hard Fate condemned him to write for an audience rigidly Mid-Victorian, to whom any mention of sex, except in a mushily sentimental manner or for the purpose of pointing an unmistakable moral, was anathema. The arbiters of literary fashion, the Northern editors, were fine, clean, cultured men of the New England type, but they were a product of their public. In order to be published at all Hearn must conform to their narrow standards, to repress the very springs of his life, the wells of his art. He must let no hint of the cloven hoof appear, no suggestion that the satisfaction of sex was “the highest rite in Nature’s temple.” But suppression, as always, exacts a price and from Hearn it was a heavy one. The desire to express his passional urge was forced back into his unconscious self where, imprisoned like a captive wild beast, it waited an opportunity to escape. It could only get by that watchful guard, the conscious self, by masquerading as something else, and so it reappeared in his work changed into sensuous beauty of sound and musical phrase. As he could not

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frankly treat of the subjects that obsessed him, he found other themes about which to weave his melodious descriptions,—themes so unreal and set in such exotic backgrounds that they would more or less veil his real preoccupations. Folklore supplied the peg upon which he hung the fruits of his depersonalized passion.

This constant vigilance to suppress, finally came to inhibit his creative power and explains the carefully wrought artificiality—the tenuousness of subject matter, but the exquisite finish of form, which is characteristic of all his books. The truth is he was forced to spin gossamer out of hemp when he could have made it into strong rope.

It is pathetic that he was only able to satisfy his real literary instincts by proxy, one might say, through his translations of some of Théophile Gautier's stories, which he succeeded in publishing after years of patient waiting. Even when they were accepted it was not the excellence of the translation, but the European prestige of the author that carried the day, for if Hearn had written them himself, no publisher would have dared brave public opinion,—not for a good many years at least. If he had been writing now when it is the literary fashion to empty one's subconscious self naked onto the printed page, he would have expanded along much broader lines, been far more really creative.

While, of course, "Our Book Table" was the most important from a literary point of view, a Sunday column which first appeared November 9, 1879, and ran to December 10, 1880, called "Our Advice Book" was by far the most unconsciously humorous, for in it Hearn, perfectly improvident person that he was, solemnly advised young men how to invest their money and succeed in



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business and, more anomalous still, he gave serious counsel to female correspondents as to their love affairs, in spite of the fact that he was always complicating his own life with compromising liaisons. Surely one would think it was the blind leading the blind, but, strangely enough, the advice was not given with his tongue in his cheek. On the contrary it was tendered in all good faith and a spirit of helpfulness. As a matter of fact, it was good common sense which, unfortunately, he seemed never able to apply to his own affairs. But all the humour of the column was not unconscious; sometimes Hearn made definite attempts to be funny, as he did in his answer to the correspondent who wanted to know how to make tartar sauce.<sup>1</sup>

“There are two good ways in which a Tartar sauce may be made. You can try whichever you please; but if you are in a hurry the second will suit your purpose better than the first. 1st:—Catch a *young Tartar*: for the old ones are very tough and devoid of juice. To catch a Tartar is generally a very unpleasant and at all times a difficult undertaking. A young Tartar will probably cost you at least \$10,000—and perhaps your life—before you get through with him: but if you must have Tartar sauce you must be ready to take all risks. Having procured your Tartar you must kill him privately, taking care that the act shall escape the observation of the police authorities, who would probably in such a case be strongly prejudiced in favor of the Tartar. Having killed, skinned and cleaned the Tartar, cut off the tenderest part of the hams and thighs; boil three hours, and then hash up with Mexican pepper, aloes and spices. Add a quart of

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, November 16, 1879.



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mulled wine and slowly boil to the consistency of honey. You will probably find the Tartar sauce very palatable; and if hermetically sealed in bottles with the addition of a little Santa Cruz rum, will serve for a long time. The rest of the Tartar will not keep, and must be disposed of judiciously. 2nd:—Take the yolk of a hard-boiled egg, a teaspoonful of mustard, a tablespoonful of olive oil, a little vinegar, a little parsley and pickled cucumber, and hash up very fine.”

But those already mentioned were not the only columns that were the product of Hearn's diligence. To “Wayside Notes” he frequently contributed, while “Odds and Ends,” “The Item Miscellany” and “Varieties” were entirely his work. The last three were sporadic in appearance, but contained interesting bits of literary gossip from the French periodicals, condensed paragraphs of his own opinions, or picturesque oddments of local colour and incident that he gleaned on the rambles that had become a fixed habit. His work at the office was finished by one o'clock and then he made his quiet, almost furtive way, from 39 Natchez Street to some of the weird restaurants in French town.

Since his arrival his appearance had changed a great deal. He no longer wore the spectacles which had so magnified the repulsive peculiarity of his eyes and an enormously broad-brimmed black felt hat, reminiscent of Texas, had been substituted for the mongrel cap. This, he fondly believed, cast into grateful obscurity his ocular defects and gave to his figure a suggestion of romantic dash. As a matter of fact, it made him look like the stub end of a candle being snuffed out by a pie plate.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

He was particularly fond of going to a restaurant on Dumaine Street which was the meeting-place for all the Spanish-speaking people of the water-front. Here he often lunched with his friend and Spanish teacher, Don José de Jesus y Preciado, who had knifed a man in New Orleans in '65 and fled to Cuba where he laid "perdu" for four years before returning to eke out a living as journalist and teacher. Because of his middle name, "Jesus," Hearn always referred to him as his "peripatetic blasphemy." At first he thought the proprietor a Chinaman, but later discovered his error and wrote to Krehbiel:<sup>1</sup>

"It turned out that my Chinaman was a Manil-lan, handsome, swarthy, with a great shock of black hair, wavy as that of a Malabaress. His movements were supple, noiseless, leopardine; the Mongolian blood was scarcely visible. But his wife was positively attractive;—hair like his own, a splendid figure, sharp strongly marked features, and eyes whose very obliqueness only rendered the face piquant,—as in those agreeable yet sinister faces painted on Japanese lacquer ware. The charge for a meal was only twenty-five cents,—four dishes allowed, with dessert and coffee, and only five cents for every extra dish one might choose to order. I generally ordered a nice steak, stewed beef with potatoes, stewed tongue, a couple of fried eggs, etc."

Which would go to prove that, in spite of his size, Hearn was no mean trencherman.

After he had eaten one of his far from frugal lunches

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Letters," Bisland, Volume I, page 204.

## THE WOLFISH DOG



The dog days approach and the dogs continue to abandon themselves to midnight orgies with a sense of perfect security.

The dog ordinance is not put into execution except in the case of fine aristocratic dogs belonging to rich people.

These fine dogs are all well brought up and know how to mind their own business. It is the nasty, snarling, mongrel, vulgar dog which ought to be looked after—the dog which never minds his own business and is always poking his nose into other people's affairs.

The currish and vulgar dog shows his wolfish instincts at night, when he and his brethren render certain streets like unto the streets of Constantinople. Woe be to the wayfarer who walks without a big stick in such neighborhoods after dark. The dogs circle about him in packs and threaten to tear him limb from limb.

Hearn has caricatured himself in this sketch, large hat, pop-eye, small figure, etc. It is one of the illustrated skits he published in the *Item*.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

it was his habit to sally forth into the French quarter, poking here and there in his myopic way, picking up some old book, stray phrase or quaint gombo proverb as a ragpicker finds lost jewels in his gatherings. Sometimes he loitered, listening to the slurred French of old negresses gossiping on the corner. Once he eaves-dropped while two Creole housewives in sunbonnets exchanged sarcastic compliments in their disjointed jargon—literal translations of French idioms. Said one: <sup>1</sup>

“And for why you have not of crab? Because one must dem boil live! It is all vat of most beast to tell so. How you make for dem kill so you not dem boil live? You cannot cut dem the head off, for dat dey have not of head. You cannot break to dem de back, for dat dey not be only all back. You cannot dem bleed until dey die, for dat dey not have blood. You not can stick to dem troo de brain, for dat dey be same like you—dey not have of brain.”

Down it went in his careful notebook, as soon as he could get round the corner and the next evening it appeared in the *Item*—a peculiar paragraph to be sandwiched in between two solemn editorials on political questions.

He adored superstitions and was always watching for new ones. One day he saw a door burst suddenly open and an irate Frenchwoman rush out, broom in hand, and throw a handful of salt on a seemingly harmless little negro girl who had been idly crumbling leaves and letting them fall upon the doorstep. The child was

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, “Creole Crab,” October 5, 1879.

## Item Days

frightened and ran away crying, "I didn' mean no harm," while the fuming French housewife, grumbling to herself, sprinkled salt on the leaves and violently brushed them into the gutter. Hearn's curiosity was roused to fever heat. He afterwards found out that crumpling leaves on a doorstep was believed by the superstitious to be a method of casting "voodoo" spells on the occupants of the house and that the only way to foil these evil charms was to throw salt on both the person and the leaves.

On another expedition he drifted "way back o' town" and came upon an old negro mammy. He lingered to listen because her naïf monologue filled him with joy.

"You know dey say t'ree draps ob blood outer de end ob a black cat's tail will cure de shingles. And de shingles am a drefful disorder. Well, my Tom, wot's a blacker'n de old debbil hisself, wuz a-purrin on my lap; and 'long comes a man an' stops at de door. 'Ma'am' says he, 'I'll gin you a five dollar bill ef you'll let me jus' clip off de end of dat dere cat's tail;—for dat am a genuwine black cat, and I'se got de shingles awfful bad,' says he, like he wuz talking to hisself. 'Deed,' I says, 'I don' want to take no man's money for an act of Christian Charity; but you'se got to take Tom 'way off whar I ken't see him, nor hear him a hollerin' an' you mussen hurt him mor' an you ken help! Den he took Tom aroun' back in de yahd, an' jus' whacked off de en' of his tail quicker 'an wink; an' fust thing I knowed Tom come a runnin' in an' went under the stove, an' de en' of his pore tail all a bleedin'. But it did'n seem to hurt him enny, an' he got well soon—on'y dar was right on de en' ob his tail a



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

little funny place whar de har wouldn' grow no mo'." <sup>1</sup>

The river front supplied him with many salty incidents for his columns and the levee had a place in his affections only second to that of the Vieux Carré, but he never stepped foot on it that his desire to move—to travel—to satisfy mysterious undefined haunting cravings, did not flame up; his Gypsy blood always pounded at the sight of the intricate rigging of ships or the adventurous tang of the myriad smells that floated around them. He loved to dream on the levee!

"I see antiquated vessels from outlandish tropical ports come in, and I creep on board; and when they spread their white wings for flight to the far, far South, my soul—(such a soul as I have) floats after them in a sigh. I see English steamers from India named with the names of Rajahs, and of sacred tomes upon the jungle-bordered Ganges;—then I dream of tamarinds and tropic things,—of Indian dancing girls—of elephants and fans and howdahs,—and of the twin domes of moresque palaces shining white under the light, like the breasts of some fair giantess in slumber. I see Mediterranean ships that have rocked at anchor in the Bay of Naples, and whose swarthy crews have watched by night the red glow from the single eye of Cyclopean Vesuvius. Then I think of Pompeii and the cities of the Campania,—the crumbling aqueducts, and the memories of a thousand years. The sailors tell me stories of Cyprus and Crete, Alexandria and Algiers, Smyrna and the Golden Horn. Sometimes an English mate treats me to a fresh

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, "Back of Town," May 20, 1879. "Wayside Notes."

## Item Days

bottle of English ale in the Captain's cabin; and often a West Indian trader presents me with some fragrant cigars, of deliciousness unspeakable.

"I cannot say that I am satisfied in spite of all these nice things. I feel restless like the camel of the desert on nearing the walls of Damascus. I long to leave the harbour with every ship that sails away to Norway or Iceland, or the port of Odessa or the harbour of Costa Rica. I have become weary of this Southern atmosphere with its lazy heat and voluptuous odours, and have a vague desire to see something else,—to do something else.

"I am certainly going somewhere. But when? I don't know. I only know that there are many ships sailing to and fro; and that some day I shall creep under the shadow of a sail and lie down on a coil of rope, and sail away. And when they shall ask me, saying, 'Whither, O stranger, dost thou desire to go?—and at what port dost thou desire to disembark?'—then I shall only answer in a dreamful way, 'Sail on, O Mariner, anywhere, everywhere;—I don't know!'"<sup>1</sup>

In 1879 Hearn learned that the *Item*, to which he had given two years of unbelievably versatile toil, was tottering on the verge of financial ruin. The mere idea of having to repeat the sufferings of his first search for work in Cincinnati and New Orleans threw him into a panic of apprehension and he racked his brain to find some expedient to prop the trembling fortunes of his paper.

He had always had a knack for making clever little pen and pencil sketches which must have been a family

<sup>1</sup> From a letter to Krehbiel now in the possession of the author.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

heritage, for his father drew well and his uncle was an artist living in Paris. So Hearn in this extremity suggested to his editor, Mark Bigney, that illustrations on the front page of the *Item* might increase its circulation and offered to make the drawings himself—a suggestion that was accepted with alacrity.

To his already onerous duties of columnist, book-reviewer, dramatic critic, translator and editorial writer, he now added one more—that of cartoonist. Sunday afternoons found him wandering through his beloved Vieux Carré or along the levees looking for subjects for his facile pencil. It was no uncommon sight to see his small figure, blotted in the angle of some old wall, peeking around the corner to catch a glimpse of a knife grinder or old negro mammy selling candies, and then dodging back to complete his laborious sketch, his paper held close to his nose under the shadow of his enormous black felt hat. At other times he sat in the dusty depths of old shops doing sketches of a favourite book dealer or working out some idea for which he needed no model.

These sketches were sent to a firm of artisans called Bennett & Zenneck, who cut them in a rather primitive manner upon wood blocks. Each day one of these blocks was fixed in the type forms at the head of the description or verse that Hearn had written to accompany it, and the paper was printed directly from this combination of metal type and wood block.

This column soon became a sort of illustrated diary of Hearn's daily experiences. Pictures appeared of all the picturesque old beggars, the charcoal vendor, the fortune teller, flower sellers, negro boot-blacks, sailors and all the queer characters that wandered the streets of New Orleans in those days. The variety seemed endless;

EXTRACT FROM THE SPACHE OV  
PADDY WHACK.

[Exchange Alley—usually between the hours of  
11 a. m. and 1 p. m., or any other hou .



"Gimme a nickel, Mither.

"Accordin' to the Jewdisherly ov the United States, this is a free country; an' I'll spake all I want to, you ould diyil-tailed omadhaun—

"Give us a nickel.

"I am Ginerall Grant and Ginerall Grant is me. Whin the King iv England said to Ginerall Washington—May the Divil tear yer livers out, ye black son of a dirty mother—Dam yez all, I'll spake all I pleze; an' I'll plaze just what I plaze.

.... As I was sayin',—Whin the King iv Italy said to Ginerall Washington—

"Give us a nickel, boss.

"Go to d— ye ould yellow-livered jackass of a spalpeen;—may your money git blue-mowldy for want of surkilation!.....As I was sayin', ladies and gintelmin an' fello-citizens of the Yonited States,—it is a dizzgrace to see, in this free country, a man wantin' a bite to put betune his teeth. Yere not content to starve the wurraking mau,—but wid yer odorless machines yez spile his appetite. Whin the King iv Gomorrah said to Ginerall Grant—

"Give us a nickel.

"Ye ould baldheaded double-gutted pot-iv-thripe, may all the devils bite yez Iv yez think to dhrive me out iv the public streets, that yez can't pay for to kape from stinking, yez'll foind that this is a free country. I'll stand me ground, bi-the Hokey, like a Roosian—

"Give us a nickel.

"Yere a gentleman, divil take yez, an God forgive me for tellin' sich a lie.....

[Here a policeman took him by the ear and gently, but firmly, led him away.]

One of Hearn's illustrated articles from the *Item*.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

boarding-house keepers speaking their strange fractured English were mixed with policemen extorting protection money from poor harlots; the amateur musician was pilloried with a banjo in his hands and funny verses described the agonies he inflicted on his hearers. Finally Hearn did a caricature of himself, big hat, bulged eye and all, repelling the attack of a pack of wolf-like dogs. These sketches were rather crude, but very graphic, and, in all, he published about 175 of them in two years—1879 and 1880—which was a goodly number when the tremendous amount of literary work he did is remembered. Taken as a whole this column gives a remarkably vivid picture of the daily round of his life, what he saw, whom he met and how he himself reacted; while as an illustrated description of the life of New Orleans in 1880—much of the picturesqueness has since disappeared—it is unrivalled.

That the illustrations accomplished the object for which they were designed there is no doubt for, in a hitherto unpublished letter to Mr. Krehbiel, Hearn wrote: "I made them turn it" (the *Item*) "into a sort of illustrated journal about five months ago. The pictures are not magnificent, but the experiment paid well, for the adoption of my suggestion put the journal on its feet at a time when it was on the verge of dissolution."

No record remains why Hearn ceased to make these pictures. Possibly he became bored or maybe it was due to the untimely death of Zenneck, the wood engraver. The manner of his demise was most unfortunate, but was interesting chiefly because it was due to an everyday hazard of the newspaper business of those times, to which our modern editors, luckily, are not subjected. Zenneck was, unfortunately, calling on the edi-

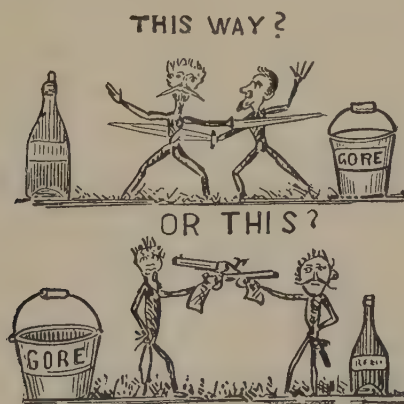


## Item Days

tor of the *Mascotte* just when a gentleman, smarting under a personal attack which had appeared in that vile little sheet, burst into the office and opened fire on the editor. As usual it was the guilty party who escaped and the innocent, poor Zenneck, who was killed.

This sort of a fray, however, was a matter of common occurrence in those times, and an editor had to be always ready to support his published opinions by a recourse to the duel.

Even gentle Mark Bigney, editor-in-chief of the *Item*, became involved in such an altercation with Major Hersey, editor of the *Democrat*. This was carried on in the columns of their respective newspapers with much spirit until the Major spoiled it all by sending his seconds to wait on Bigney who refused to fight because he thought duels were foolish. Hearn sympathized entirely with his chief's point of view and did a funny little caricature of the Major and Bigney fighting with swords and a second one fighting with pistols. He labelled it "This way? Or This?" and slipped it among the editorials without comment.



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

Major Hersey, too peppery an old gentleman to take water, sent word to Bigney to arm himself, as he would shoot on sight; but Bigney, true to his theories, replied that he had never felt the necessity for carrying a weapon and would not begin, so that if the Major killed him it would be plain cold-blooded murder.

A few days later the "Pacifist" and the "Jingo" met face to face in the street. Little Major Hersey struck at Bigney with a loaded cane. The giant Bigney grabbed the stick and, breaking it in two, pushed the Major in the chest with the pieces. To the mortification of the bantam editor, the force of the shove landed him seated in the gutter. This finished the fight.

Duelling was so common in those days, especially in newspaper circles, that it is strange Hearn never became involved in one, as he was absolutely fearless in expressing his disapproval of any one he thought dishonest or unfair. His immunity was probably due to his defective eyesight, as no decent man would have challenged him, handicapped in that way.

His habits of life also helped to protect him, as on account of his unconquerable shyness he mixed with few. With his fellow employés he was most distant, quietly slipping in and out to his work with scarcely a nod of greeting.

Charles Donnaud, a reporter on the *Item* at that time, said Hearn paid absolutely no attention to him until one day he read an obituary which Donnaud had written about an old woman grown ancient in sin. Instead of stressing the moral obloquy of this Jezebel, he had spoken of her generous qualities and her ready willingness to help those in trouble. This appealed to Hearn's sympathies for the under dog and he sought

## Item Days

Donnaud out, shook hands with him and praised his article. This acquaintance ripened into a real friendship. A most embarrassing thing happened, however, on the first night Donnaud took Hearn home with him to dine. Living in the household was a youngster of six or seven who had just seen a performance of "Pinafore," then in the heyday of its popularity. When Hearn entered the room, the boy was surprised by his bulging eye and burst out in a shrill voice, "My Lord, Grandma, here comes Dick Dead Eye himself!" If a grown-up had made this cruel remark Hearn would have incontinently fled, never to return, but he loved children and spent the whole evening trying to make Donnaud's mother forget the mortification her grandson had caused her.

Hearn seemed to appreciate this quiet home life and good Creole coffee, for he often repeated this first visit.

The only other fellow-reporter he knew well was James Augustin. Their bond of sympathy was Augustin's remarkable knowledge of Creole tradition. They used to take long walks together through the Vieux Carré, and Augustin retold all the tales he had heard from his grandfather and pointed out the houses where the various incidents occurred. These walks always ended at the Old Absinthe House where the two friends indulged in a small glass of Pernod or Anisette as an antidote to their weariness.

One day the idea occurred to Augustin that the Quadroon Ball might be of interest to Hearn and he suggested they go. Hearn was eager, so that night they repaired to a fine old building on Bienville Street, between Burgundy and Dauphine, where the ball was held. There congregated all of the most beautiful of the octo-

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

roon women, but never a man of colour was allowed even to put the tip of his nose inside except as musician or servant. These women came here to dance with the white protectors they already had or to find new ones. As far back as 1806 their position had been as firmly fixed and delimited by custom as the laws of the Medes and the Persians. In descent they were French and Spanish with an admixture of only a quarter, or less, negro blood, and by some strange freak of nature's alchemy this combination produced a race of women who, for purely sensual allure and beauty, have hardly ever been surpassed. One English traveller said of the quadroon women that they were "the most beautiful he had ever seen, resembling the higher order of women among the high caste Hindoos, lovely countenances, full dark liquid eyes, lips of coral, teeth of pearl, sylph-like figures, and such beautifully rounded limbs and exquisite gait and manners that they might furnish models for a Venus or a Hebe."

They could not mate with negroes, the feeling of refinement inherited from the white side of their ancestry would have been too outraged, neither could they marry white men; the sentiment of the whole South was adamant on this. Even if some white man, lured by the shadowy Circe charms, had been willing to become a social pariah by marrying an octoroon, the hard and fast laws against miscegenation would have prevented. There remained only one course open to these victims of heredity—they must become the mistresses of white men.

These compulsory conditions were realized so thoroughly that a separate and different code of morals grew up for them. A young octoroon girl was taken by her

THE DEVIL IN CARONDELET STREET.

"Here we go up, up, up,  
And here we go down, down, downy."



Knights of the Flags, bring hither your rags—  
Your stocks, your warrants—I'll hold them all.  
Of his ample margin your Master brags;  
Come, lover of Incre, now heed my call.  
Up, up, with the bulls, my gentle sonny!  
Down, down with the bears, if you want your  
money!

Up, up they go on the curbstone row,  
The premium bonds that so lately fell;  
I manage it all in my court below  
And send my orders direct from hell!  
The dealers I weigh in a way most funny,  
And poise the scales with their own loved money.

Up, up, hurrah! for the changeful law!  
Hurrah for the victims that loudly squeal!  
In my pleadings can never be found a flaw;  
In "spots" and "futures" I always deal.  
Now up now down, it's truly funny,  
How sharps and flats sell their souls for money.

It is said that just before the decision  
of the Supreme Court was rendered, a

Premium bonds were issued by the city which had a lottery feature with periodical drawings. Later the lower courts held that they were illegal, which caused them to drop tremendously in value. The Supreme Court reversed this decision, and of course the bonds jumped.

Hearn was outraged by the fact that so many widows and orphans lost money by these fluctuations, so he directed this editorial in verse against the stockbrokers and politicians who had rigged this deal.

Published in the *Item*, June 2, 1880.



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

mother to the quadroon ball or to walk in a certain park. When she had attracted the attention of some white admirer the man went to her mother and made all the arrangements, paying a certain sum which would serve to support the girl should he tire of her and cast her off. When these formalities were accomplished the girl became what they called "placée," or placed, and she generally gave a party to her friends just as other girls have wedding breakfasts. As long as she was faithful to her white protector (and infidelity was very rare among them) no breath of scandal attached to her or her position among her own class. If, at any time, her lover tired of her and deserted her she was then free to enter into the same relation with another white man.

These balls gave to these women a place of social amusement, a sort of club and an opportunity to win their lovers. They were run at this period by *Hermína*, a noted procuress, and outward decorum at least was always enforced. But, under cover, many a jealous passion was aroused and resulted in a quiet challenge and adjournment at daybreak to the duelling oaks in City Park.

Hearn went to one of these balls and his reactions proved to be most surprising. Strange to say, as soon as he entered he seemed to lose all his usual shyness and timidity and the slightly melancholic aloofness that was his natural manner. A queer burst of gaiety swept him, and his sensitive nostrils quivered with excitement as he laughed and joked with the pretty quadroons. When three o'clock arrived his companion became tired and suggested home and bed, but Hearn refused to go and, drunk with strange emotions, stayed on alone. What explanation can there be of this timid, shrinking,

## Item Days

sensitive soul suddenly blossoming forth as a forward squire of dames, and dames, at that, whose complexion ran from dull gold to soft cream? Of course the obvious one is that the man's frank sensuousness was strong enough to dominate all his other traits; but a more subtle and more likely explanation lies in certain of his psychological peculiarities. He was mentally incapable of adapting himself to the ordinary conditions of life and coping with them successfully. Psychiatrists would have classed him, to-day, under the heading of "Defective Personality." As is the case with this mental type, repeated failures had led him to construct an unreal world in which to live. This world he fashioned from the books he read and he peopled it with the characters he read about. Knowing then the strange exotic literature he fed upon, would it not be possible for the pretty mulatress, touched by the wand of his unhealthy imagination, to become for one night at least an equally brunette Egyptian queen, Indian Maharanee or Zenanah beauty?

There were times when he became almost fatally entangled in the net he himself had fashioned. At least once the seductive attractions his passionate imagination cast about women of a certain class almost conquered him, and he became for a time, a helpless Pygmalion at the feet of the bronze Galatea whom he had created.

"I have suffered the tortures of a thousand damned souls. I went too near the flame and got cruelly burned. I approached my lips too often to lips that set my blood on fire. I was foolish enough to say 'I am too strong by experience to be entrapped'; and I got caught in a terrible net. If you

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

knew all I am sure you would pity me. I became passionately in love before I knew it; and then!—It required all the reason and all the strength I could summon to save myself; but it took me months to do it—she came to me in dreams and made me feel her shadowy caresses. Don't think I am exaggerating. You have no idea of the strange fascination possessed by some of these *serpent women*. And at last the dreams became vaguer and have finally vanished. Yet as I write, I do not dare to state that I am cured. I know that another kiss even another look, would plunge me into a depth of ruin which no earthly power could save me from. And the temptation is always before me. You do not understand me perhaps! You think I am writing folly and madness. But you could never understand me further unless you lived in this accursed city. Still I love it so much. I love New Orleans!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to a friend.





## V: "The Hard Times"

WHEN Hearn left his first abiding place in Baronne Street, in the American section of town, he quite naturally gravitated to the Vieux Carré—it fascinated him and, besides, the rents were lower. There he lived in houses picturesque but insanitary—where the perfume of past grandeur mingled with the odours of present decay.

It is hard, to-day, to imagine the discomforts he suffered in these places. Water laid so near the surface in New Orleans, before the present drainage system had been installed, that any attempt at digging a cellar would have drowned the labourers, consequently the first floor of all buildings came within a few inches of ground that was dank and damp. There were no heating facilities other than small fireplaces, rooms were enormous and ceilings eighteen feet high, while doors and windows



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

were always leaky. Indoors, it was unbearably cold in winter, but in summer fairly pleasant. The rooms Hearn lived in had, at best, only a tiny soft-coal grate, which gave out so little heat that by huddling over it he was scarcely able to warm one side at a time while the other shivered and froze in the chill atmosphere. Plumbing there was none. Enormous wooden tanks, two stories high, placed in the corner of patios stored the rain from the roofs and afforded the sole water supply. Tin tubs, kept in the kitchen and grudgingly carried upstairs upon demand, were the sole bathing facilities beyond, of course, the traditional pitcher and basin. His desire for a daily bath was looked upon askance by his landladies on account of the labor of carrying water from the surface cisterns up one or two flights of stairs. They thought him very eccentric, if not slightly deranged, and again and again they solemnly warned him that such unheard of practices could only result in serious illness.

Given Hearn's queerness of disposition and the trouble caused by his habits of cleanliness, it is not surprising his changes of address were numberless and impossible to trace thoroughly. He has, however, left a description of some of them. There was the large old Creole mansion on St. Louis Street, fallen from its one time grandeur to the sordid status of a rooming-house, where, for three dollars a week, he was enchanted with ghostly eeriness and mute reminders of past romance and luxury. But sometimes the places he lived in were not so dignified, as when he occupied a room in a house whose ground floor was rented to a fortune-teller, her "fantastic apartment kept dark all day, except for the light of two little tapers burning before two human



## “The Hard Times”

skulls in one corner of the room.” One may be certain he became acquainted with such an eccentric fellow-boarder.

For a while a stately old house at 105 Bourbon Street (now 516) sheltered him. It had banana trees and sweet olive bushes growing in a side garden and it almost faced the old French Opera House. In the evening, during the season, the carriages and lights, the lovely women streaming up the stairs of the Opera House and the pervading spirit of Latin gaiety fascinated him. Almost against his wishes (he was practically tone deaf and did not like music) he was lured across the street to sit in the orchestra, dreaming strange dreams of ghostly kisses pulsating with passion. Some evenings it was the plot of the Opera that held his attention and on the days following, delightful versions of the story of Carmen or Aïda found their way into the *Item*. Other nights he used his reportorial privileges and wandered behind the scenes weaving unreal mystic word pictures of what he saw and heard.

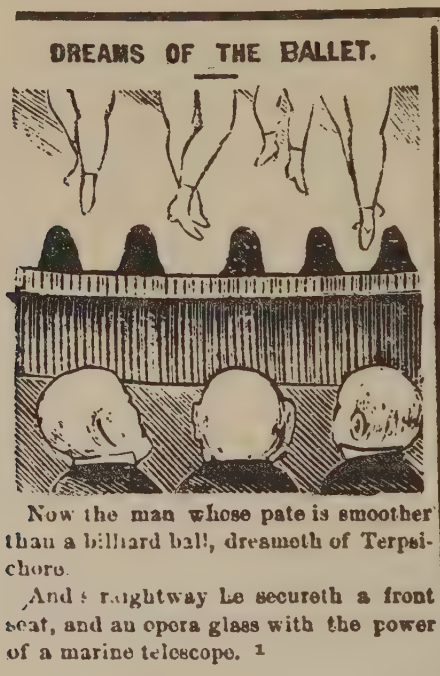
The heterogeneous procession of rooming-house keepers with whom he became familiar, their disjointed English—literal translations of French idioms—and their eternal complaints about their roomers, was burnt into his brain and from time to time vivid scraps of their monologues turned up among his editorials.

For a while, soon after he had gone to work on the *Item*, he had lived in a particularly shabby room over in the northern end of the French quarter near the Spanish, where, by doing his own cooking, he was able to cut his expenses for food down to two dollars a week and, in this manner, put away three quarters of his salary, now raised to twenty dollars. These grimly

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

made savings he hoarded for a very special purpose. He had a plan.

During his first seven months of idleness in New Orleans, he had met in eating joints, grimy lodgings or loafing on park benches, all sorts of down and out



sharpers and it was one of these who suggested it would be profitable to open a cheap restaurant. The plan appealed to Hearn and he wrote his old friend Watkin in February, 1878, asking his advice as to whether he should go to Texas and start a "cheap beanhouse" with his "pard." While the scheme was, of course, abandoned as both the "partners" were penniless, the idea still

<sup>1</sup> One of Hearn's illustrations in the *Item*.

## “The Hard Times”

continued to germinate in Hearn's brain, and he wrote again to Watkin in June, saying there were some businesses that would pay in New Orleans—"a cheap restaurant, a cheap swimming bath, or a cheap laundry"; and later in August that: "Money can be made here out of the poor. People are so poor here nothing pays except that which appeals to poverty—now one can make thirty milk biscuits for five cents and eight cups of coffee for five cents."

Later, after Hearn had gotten his job on the *Item*, the return to the old hated newspaper routine made him very rebellious and once more his desire to be independent, to travel, to have leisure to write, flamed up and his mind became particularly open to any plan promising possible gain. Evidently his old "pard" who had previously suggested the beanery in Texas realized Hearn's receptive frame of mind and took advantage of it by resurrecting the idea of a cheap restaurant and, for obvious reasons connected with the fact that Hearn was drawing a salary, now suggested that it be started in New Orleans. He "generously" agreed to take the management if Hearn could save enough from his pay with which to begin business. Impractical, gullible Hearn became wildly enthusiastic; and the shrewd, lank, cynical Yankee and the sensitive, intellectual boy must have been a remarkable sight as they sat in some smelly restaurant, bent over a greasy table, lighted only by a guttering candle, discussing their plans and wondering what the profit was on each unsavoury five-cent dish they tasted.

Their scheme had aborted before owing to lack of capital so now Hearn set himself to save diligently, which explains the reason he took the dingy room and

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did his own cooking. By these economies he soon hoarded one hundred dollars and then wrote Krehbiel: "Will start a little business for myself next week. I have an excellent partner.—a Northern man.—and we expect by Spring to clear enough ready money to start for South America."

Every day, after his work at the office was finished, Hearn met his "pard" and they combed the city for a suitable location for the new venture that was also sufficiently cheap.

Their choice finally fell upon a tumble-down, disreputable one-storied brick house in a sordid back street with an incongruous name, 160 Dryades. Then followed hectic weeks of preparation. Together they soon exhausted the hundred dollars buying thick clumsy chinaware, cheap table utensils, and paint. "Pard" attended to cleaning up the place and painting, while Hearn inaugurated a publicity campaign by having yellow hand-bills printed which read:

### "THE 5-CENT RESTAURANT.

#### "160 DRYADES,

"This is the cheapest eating house in the South. It is neat, orderly and respectable as any other in New Orleans. You can get a good meal for a couple of nickels. All dishes 5 cents. Everything half the price of the markets."

When he actually saw the finished dodger, however, the name did not appeal to him. It seemed to lack distinction or imagination and so, after much serious discussion, it was decided to rechristen the experiment


"The Hard Times"

Daily City Item

39 Natchez Street.

New Orleans, Monday \_\_\_\_\_ 187

Friend V. - I delayed answering yours of Sunday, partly because waiting for postage; but mostly because interrupted in my letter by another fit of fever sickness, which laid <sup>me</sup> up for the rest of the week. So you must not think me neglectful, old fellow. I have just received your postal card. Just stick Mabel in envelope, stick a few stamps on, and send her off. It would be waste of money to send by express. If you don't like writing to P. O. write to me in care of M. Fr. Brogney, at above address. I hope to see you before many ~~few~~ months, for a few hours, anyhow, as I am soon going to take flight.

Yours, hopefully & sorrowfully  
Superintendent - 



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

"The Hard Times"—an ominous name whose evil portent was perfectly realized later.

Finally the stage was all set and on the second of March, 1879, "The Hard Times" was opened for business and on that same day a laconic little advertisement in the *Item* averred that "The Hard Times, 160 Dryades, satisfies hunger for one nickel."

All the hopes of freedom Hearn pinned on this enterprise, all the castles in Spain for which it was to be the foundation; all the journeys and adventures in foreign lands for which it was to furnish funds will never be known. At first everything looked auspicious, and Hearn wrote to Watkin:—

"The Raven" (he called himself that to him) "keepeth a restaurant in the city of New Orleans. It is secretly in business for itself. It is also in the newspaper business. The reason it has gone into business for itself is that it is tired of working for other people. The reason that it is still in the newspaper line is that the business is not yet paying, and needs some financial support. The business is the cheapest in New Orleans. All dishes are five cents. Knocks the market price out of things. The business has already cost about one hundred dollars to set up. May pay well; may not. The Raven has a partner—a large and ferocious man, who kills people who disagree with their coffee. . . . It is constantly suspicious that Its partner may go back on It. It is of a suspicious character. It has debts on Its mind, but prefers to look after Its own interests at present,—until It can buy some clothes. It also proposes to establish another five-cent restaurant here in the French quarter, sooner or later if this one pays.—The Raven may succeed

## “The Hard Times”

right off. He may not. But he is going to succeed sooner or later, even if he has to start an eating-house in Hell.”<sup>1</sup>

This grim determination to succeed did not permit him to look idly on without taking a hand in the running of the place; and he described his activities in a letter to Krehbiel:

“I have become a restaurant proprietor. Doling out coffee and hot rolls; beefsteak and soup; cold tongue and stew. It is the cheapest restaurant in New Orleans. We have one room for coloured folks in the back part; one for white folks in the front part, opening on the street with a swing door. Profits are about 300 per cent. But the tax collector has not been around yet.”<sup>2</sup>

Every day modest advertisements had been appearing in the *Item* and their general spirit was an accurate barometer of the fluctuating success of “The Hard Times.” At first they were simple statements calculated to appeal to the man of large appetite and lean purse, as: *The best coffee and the biggest biscuits in town, 5 cents at “The Hard Times.”* As customers seemed slow in coming Hearn became argumentative and the advertisement asked: *Why pay 40c when you can get a good steak for 5c at 160 Dryades?* and, as trade began to pick up, a note of pride of possession crept in and he spoke from his own experience saying: *Five-cent restaurants are often shabby, dirty places, but you ought to see 160 Dryades!*

<sup>1</sup> “Letters from the Raven,” by Lafcadio Hearn. Brentano. P. 66.

<sup>2</sup> From a hitherto unpublished letter in the author’s collection.

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Finally when success seemed almost certain the advertisements shouted with assurance: *Whoever does not go to 160 Dryades has an empty belly and an empty purse*, or, pugnaciously stated: *We can whip all creation for 5 cent grub, 160 Dryades*.

Of course Hearn could not long avoid giving them a literary turn and his enthusiasm bubbled over in such picturesque statements as: *Solomon was a wise man. He would have boarded at 160 Dryades*.

*The Queen of Sheba would have been more pleased with 160 Dryades than with Solomon*.

*The Devil fears the wise man, you can become wise by going to 160 Dryades*.

Even the Bible was pressed into service to aid in securing patronage, and one manifesto read: *"The Lord my pasture shall prepare."* *That refers to the next life. In this go to 160 Dryades*.

From the day it opened until March 22nd, a new advertisement had appeared every evening in the *Item*, each one improving in flavour and quaintness. But then Hearn's hopes must have crumbled, for he did not have heart enough to invent anything new, he merely copied one of the earliest and least interesting of the notices. On March 23rd the crash came and, strangely enough, the very last announcement that appeared in the *Item* was a repetition of the first.

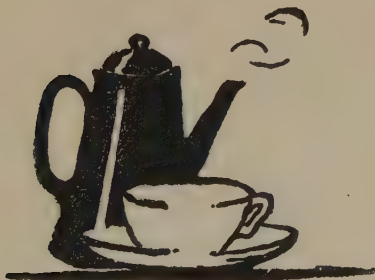
*"The Hard Times"* satisfies hunger for one nickel first blazoned to the world a knowledge of the new venture and became also its epitaph.

The inevitable had happened. Hearn was devoid of all business sense; his partner, brutally practical, lacked all morals or kindness. The earlier suspicions were well founded; "Pard" suddenly disappeared with all the cash

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and the cook, leaving Hearn to hold the bag and shoulder the debts.

Profoundly discouraged and with a bitter feeling of impotence and defeat, he settled back hopelessly into his newspaper drudgery, but never became reconciled. From time to time notions of other business ventures occupied him, and he nourished the idea of a cigar store in the West Indies, becoming a bouquiniste in New Orleans, or keeping old book shops in San Francisco and St. Augustine. These crazy projects never progressed beyond the conversational stage because, luckily for Hearn, the memory of “The Hard Times” stood like a guardian angel between him and the attempted accomplishment of any more of his fantastically impractical ideas.





## VI: A Library of Exotism

DURING the hectic rise and fall of "The Hard Times," Hearn had no leisure for his usual excursions in French Town, but now he resumed them and no matter where else he wandered there were four places he never failed to visit—all of them second-hand book shops. At Fournier's on Royal Street near Toulouse he always stopped to gossip awhile with the Creole proprietor and pawed over the shelves of dusty, grimy books before he sauntered on down the street to Julien's. He was a slight nervous little man with a drooping moustache, who had been brought to New Orleans as a boy by his Creole parents in their flight from a negro uprising in Santo Domingo. He loved to talk of his early memories of the West Indies, and Hearn frequently became so interested that he sat listening in the dark shop for hours.



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It may have been that these conversations first fired his desire to go there. After this stop he generally went to Exchange Alley, where a German named Muhl kept a book shop. It was here he found Baudelaire's translation of Poe<sup>1</sup> which inspired a column of comment in the *Item*.

He made his longest visits, however, to a shop at number 196<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> Canal Street,<sup>2</sup> kept by Armand Hawkins for the sale of paintings and old books, with antiques as a side line. Second-hand book dealers are queer fish at best; either the atmosphere of dusty volumes influence their personality or the business attracts only those who are already eccentric—it is impossible to tell. But of all the “bouquinistes” of New Orleans, Hawkins was, by far, the most curious. Born in London, his cockney parents had christened him John. It was his adventurous spirit that made him leave them and embark as a stowaway on a ship to New Orleans when he was only nine years old.

After a precarious existence, dependent upon the kindness of longshoremen, he had the good luck to ingratiate himself with a benevolent old Creole gentleman who gave him a home. Here Hawkins learned French and the intricacies of its Creole variants and took as his own his benefactor's name of “Armand.” When he was grown he embarked in the business of antique and book dealer, and at the time Hearn arrived in New Orleans had already attained fame as a “character.” Realizing the publicity value of such a reputation, he did every thing he could to foster it, even dressing the part. A fuzzy stove-pipe hat topped a pair of shrewd

<sup>1</sup> “A French Translation of Edgar Allan Poe,” *Item*, October 22, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> This building has been torn down. The Pickwick Club occupies this site now.

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eyes peering out from a lair of bushy eyebrows, and octagonal spectacles were continually slipping down to the middle of a rather large coarse nose. A patriarchal beard, yellowed in spots by tobacco-juice, flowed over the knot of a red bandana handkerchief which he wore instead of a collar, and his tall, spare, slightly stooped figure was draped in a seedy, green-seamed frock-coat



Armand Hawkins

that hung in loose and dusty folds. Even while in the store the top hat always lent dignity to his presence, and there was a rumour, how well founded is uncertain, that he slept with it on his head. A certain lack-lustre fuzziness gave some credence to the report. He was keen and resourceful and could tell a most enticing tale about every single item among the thousands of incongruous objects that cluttered his long dark shop. In fact he was known to have sold at least six examples of "the

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only sword that Lafitte, the Louisiana pirate, ever carried."

So infinite was the dust and disorder that it was surprising he could find anything. Once a friend sent him a small live alligator, which unfortunately escaped before it had been there a day. Five years passed and the alligator's fate remained a mystery. One day a clerk went into a dark closet filled with books, but suddenly rushed out shouting, "The devil's in there! The devil's in there!" Hawkins went to his assistance and saw a pair of large, gleaming eyes hovering close to the floor in a dark corner. At first he, also, was panic-stricken, but finally seizing a long stick he poked into the depths of the closet. There was a flash of white and a sharp click and something clamped down on the end of the stick. With the clerk's help Hawkins pulled and pulled until the "devil" was dragged into the open. It proved to be the little alligator, grown five feet long. That an animal of this size could have lived in the store for such a long time without being discovered, gives some slight idea of the confusion.

But Hearn liked the place and had conceived a friendly feeling for Hawkins, who displayed much more energy and intelligence in searching for the books Hearn wanted than did any of the other dealers. Then too he had the run of the shop and, after browsing along the shelves with his eye held so close as to almost brush the dust off the books with his nose, he used to retire into a little back office to write for hours on end. An added attraction was a small group of men, all interested in literature, who were in the habit of foregathering there. Among them was John Dimitry, at one time head of the Board of Education (he had given Hearn his

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letter of introduction to Major Robinson), Breedlove Smith, prosperous merchant and art enthusiast, Mr. Beckwith, the Federal District Attorney, Prof. Wm. Henry, head of a school for boys and an authority on the Creole patois, and, sometimes, Charles Gayarré, Louisiana's most picturesque historian and man of letters. There was much good-natured chaff, and Hearn's enormous hat, Hawkins' roughed-up stove-pipe or Judge Gayarré's black stock (which he always wore) seldom escaped comment. Hearn was a good listener and usually sat in silence until some one, intentionally, led the conversation into some channel in which he was keenly interested. Thus inveigled, he joined in the talk with that introspective, detached look peculiar to the myopic and in a low, well-modulated voice launched into a flow of words so brilliant and informed, so fascinating and unusual that he held his audience spellbound for as long as he chose to talk.

He was able to discuss with equal facility and erudition, any number of unusual subjects—Buddhism—Greek Phallicism—Arabian marriage customs—strange Creole legends—or the influence of passion upon history. It was rather a puzzle where he got his tremendous fund of abstruse and varied information. His college course had been cut short and, since then, he had led a hand to mouth existence working terrible, exhausting hours as a newspaper reporter and consorting, much of his time, with men and women immeasurably beneath him in brains and breeding. The explanation was simple, however, when it is remembered that he was an omnivorous reader whose memory was so retentive that, once he had read a book (which he did with almost lightning rapidity) the inmost soul and substance of it was



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his forever. All his quests in the old shops were for books on special subjects that interested him and, when he had exhausted the supply in New Orleans, he wrote to Maisonneuve in Paris or Boutet in New York, to comb the world for others.

His object in collecting books he can best explain for himself:

“By purchasing queer books and following odd subjects I have been able to give myself the air of knowing more than I do; but none of my work would bear the scrutiny of a specialist. I would like, however, to show you my library. It cost me only about two thousand dollars, but every volume is *queer*. Knowing that I have nothing resembling genius, and that any ordinary talent must be supplemented with some sort of curious Study in order to place it above the mediocre line, I am striving to woo the Muse of the Odd and hope to succeed in thus attracting attention.”

His collecting had started when he was in Cincinnati. There he bought the books written by that group of brilliant French romanticists who had aroused his passionate admiration—Gautier, Flaubert, Baudelaire, de Nerval, etc.

When he arrived in New Orleans his greater leisure permitted him more time for book hunting and he followed their trail with hound-like tenacity. If a review in any of the foreign periodicals, to which he subscribed, mentioned anything that seemed likely to satisfy his strange literary appetites, his search was relentless until he obtained it. His absorption in French authors continued, but to this was added an interest in an indige-



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nous phase of the French language. The Creole or Gombo French spoken by the negroes fascinated him and he set out to learn it. He became possessed of a copy of every grammar of the patois he could find—four in all—and studied it with Dr. Mercier, Claudel, and Professor Henry, and tried his accent on the old coloured woman who swept his room. The facility acquired in this way was to be of great use to him later. Not only would he have been unable to have produced “Gombo Zhèbes” (his little book of Creole proverbs), but also he would have failed to have gotten the local colour and legends of the West Indies where, in most parts, Gombo was the only means of communication with the negroes.

Then, for a period, Hearn's taste in literature seemed to be entirely dominated by his genealogy. He always cherished the family tradition of Gypsy blood on his father's side. To him it was romantic, mysterious, intriguing; and so we find him in 1879 and 1880 collecting, with avidity, all the books on Gypsies. There was Simson's “History of the Gypsies,” Sheridan Le Fanu's “The Bird of Passage,” Balzac's “Le Succube” and, of course, George Borrow's account of the Gypsies in Spain, and the writings of Victor Hugo, Reade, Longfellow and George Eliot on the subject. His enthusiasm overflowed in a long editorial on Gypsy Literature: <sup>1</sup>

“From Seville there comes to us a queer little book in a red paper cover whose author masks his identity under the pseudonym, ‘Damefilo’; but who certainly deserves to be better known. This book is nothing less than a most curious collection of Span-

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, July 20, 1881, “A Glance at Gypsy Literature.”

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ish Gypsy ballads, not written in Romany, but in the country dialect of Andalusia, and resembling pure Spanish about as closely as our Creole patois resembles the language of educated Paris. 'Cantes Flamencos' is the book entitled; for the Andalusians have long been in the habit of calling the Gypsies 'Flemings,' owing, it is said, to the fact that with the Flemings who entered Spain in the time of Carlos I, there came also a great multitude of the Romany or Gypsy people. These songs are those to which the Gypsy girls, so admirably sketched by Doré, dance naked footed, while the singer with one leg crossed over the other thrums his guitar, and the audience forms a wreath of cigarette smoke about the scene.

"These Gypsy songs form an entirely new collection, written down probably from dictation by Silverlo, La Lola, El Muerto, Miguel Bravo and others whose picturesque names are given in an index at the end of the work. The songs themselves are evidently of much more recent composition than the Gypsy ballads collected by Barrow and others; for there are very modern ideas in them. A lover tells his mistress that his love has the impetuosity of a railroad train:

" 'Yo t' estoy queriendo a ti  
Con la misma violencia  
Que yeva el ferro—carril.'

"Another compares the beating of his heart to the agony of the engines of an ocean steamer in a tempest. Mention of steamers is frequent. One Gypsy tells his gitanilla that he sees all the steamers come into port; but her steamer he never sees—a poetical lamentation for ships that never return.

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Mention of trips to Havana and South America are frequent, just as in our own Creole ballads we find the phrase so often recurring—

“ ‘M’ alle a la Havane  
Pou gagnin larzan.’ ”

“The Gypsy also sings, ‘Yo me voy a la Havana pa ganar dinero’—but adds that he was robbed on the way home.

“These are all love ditties; but such love!—furious, Oriental, full of frenzied passion and tortured symbolism. ‘I can brave the madness of a bull,’ cries one; ‘I can tear trees up by the roots; but with thee I can do nothing.’ Besides love, there is little else in them,—only a smothered cry for vengeance here and there. ‘The brother of my heart, they have killed him; they have killed the little sister who sucked the milk of my mother: I shall kill them.’ And these strange vows of vengeance often contain a terrific force. The singer warns his enemy:

“ ‘If I cannot reach thee in life,  
I shall come to thee in death;  
I shall go to all the tombs  
Until I find thee.’ ”

“Knives and knife-wounds are frequently mentioned in connection with great singers. ‘Do not go to La Lola; La Lola carries a knife to defend her person,’ or again, ‘Beware of La Sena; La Sena carries a knife for the man who would put himself with her.’

“But this fierceness is rare; it is generally only the fierceness of love we hear, mingled with strange tenderness. ‘I dare not go out,’ whispers one gacho,

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‘because I have not seen thee to-day; and when I cannot see thee, I go along the streets weeping and talking to myself, so that people hear me.’ Then he breaks out into these reproaches mingled with gushes of affection:

“ ‘Thou sayest thou cannot see me;  
There will come to thee in the day  
Moments when thou canst not dance.

“ ‘Thou sayest thou cannot see me;  
Thy little face is yellow  
With the force of love.

“ ‘Thou sayest thou cannot see me!  
Thou still yet remember that saying,  
By the milk thou hast sucked!’

“We translate the verses line for line. ‘By the milk thou hast sucked,’ signifying mother’s milk, is a strong oath among the gypsies. When reproaches seem to have no effect, the lover pretends to forget that his sweetheart still lives. ‘When I pass before thy door,’ he exclaims, ‘I say an Ave Maria for thee, even as if thou wert dead.’ But he bursts out suddenly in a flood of passion which sweeps away all this effort at self restraint:

“ ‘I love thee more than God. . . .  
Jesus! What have I said!—  
I deserve the Inquisition.

‘If I thought  
Thou didst not love me,  
I would deny God  
And go to live among the Moors.

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“I go out of my house,  
I go out of my house cursing,—  
Cursing even the saints that are in the pictures,  
On earth and in Heaven.

“My gypsy girl, when thou diest,  
They shall paint thee on the tomb-stone  
With the blood of my veins.

“I see all the rest  
Only thee I do not see  
Madre! My heart is striving,  
To leap from my lips.

“For a year no shirt  
I have vowed to put on  
Until I find myself again  
United to my “companera.”

“Then he adopts yet another tone. He attempts to point out to her all the evils she has done to him; he says he will enlist in the army, but stays a while to reiterate his love for her again:

“I have more power than God;  
For God cannot forgive thee  
That which I can forgive thee, sweetheart.

“I am going to serve the King;  
And the winds that shake thy door  
Are the sighs that I give.

“See if I have love for thee:  
The poison thou will give me,  
That poison I will drink.’



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“But at last she appears to be softened;

“‘By the milk I suck!

It giveth me shame to look at thee,

And to thee too when I gaze upon thee.’

“Then there is a pretty allusion to the gypsy marriage when the camisa of the bride is exhibited in the morning ‘bearing three little roses’—three little drops of blood.

“But to give our readers anything like a fair idea of the spirit of these strange little songs, we must devote another article to the subject on some future occasion. Probably our readers will not fail to find some new beauties of fancy and feeling even in the few verses we have already translated at random.”

This essay was marked No. 1, and he intimated that others would follow, but they never did, probably because his interest veered to a literature for which his mother’s antecedents had given him an instinctive love. He began the study of the Greek classics, Greek pantheism, philosophy and sculpture. This reading was reflected in the *Item* and he seriously advocated that New Orleans women return to the beautiful simplicity of Greek dress and wrote editorials on such recondite subjects as “What the Greeks Knew About Music.”

The influence of his family tree over his literary sympathies was responsible for still another change in his predilections; the fact that he believed there were traces of Arab blood in his mother’s family whetted his curiosity about desert folklore, literature and custom. So absorbed did he become that he practised writing Arabic script and addressed letters to his friends in envelopes

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covered with Arabic characters. Two stories—"Bilal"<sup>1</sup> and "Rabyah's Last Ride"<sup>2</sup>—and an "article"<sup>3</sup> on Arab remedies, although not published until some years later, were the products of this interest.

He collected and read with enthusiasm books on the Talmud, Jewish Life, the Koran, that famous Icelandic epic, the Kalewala, erotic music, Japanese art,<sup>4</sup> Buddhism, Sanscrit, Chinese Legends, Egypt, Oriental music, Aryan and Iranian subjects, comparative physiology, the rapport between sexual and vocal power and an encyclopædic list of other strange subjects.

Thus book by book he amassed, from all corners of the world, a library which covered more unusual subjects than had probably been gotten together by any one man before. Folklore of all kinds and countries predominated and French Literature of the 19th century was next in number. Of strictly Anglo-Saxon letters there was little, as was natural in the library of a man who avowed himself a Latin at heart though a mongrel by birth. The barriers were let down however in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, Herbert Spencer and those authors who treated of Oriental subjects.

In 1882 there were three hundred carefully selected books and by 1884 they had increased to five hundred—"nearly every volume of which is unfamiliar to ordinary readers."

Those he prized most he rebound in dainty morocco covers; they particularly point to his already established

<sup>1</sup> Published posthumously under the title of "The First Muezzin Bilal in Karma," Boni & Liveright, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Harper's Bazaar*, April 2, 1887.

<sup>3</sup> New York *Tribune*.

<sup>4</sup> The author has two books from Hearn's library. "L'Art Japonais par Louis Gense," published in Paris in 1886, and "Histoire de La Musique par H. Lavoix," also published in Paris. They both have, on several different pages, his rubber library stamp—Lafcadio Hearn.

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taste, "the yearning for the strange, the weird and the ghost-like, the gathered and pressed exotic flowers of folklore, the banalities and morbidities of writers with unleashed imaginations, the love of antique religions and peoples, the mysteries of mystics, the descriptions of savage life and rites."<sup>1</sup>

It was this strange library that he fashioned into a most effective tool of his trade, and from it he drew a great deal of his material both for newspaper work and his first books. But to merely catalogue the strange items it contained is to tell only half the story. Some idea must also be given of the intense interest and concentration with which he read them, of the vivid stimulation they supplied to his mind, of the caressing care with which he handled each volume and of the zest and pride with which he showed them to and discussed them with the favoured few he thought worthy of such honour.

<sup>1</sup> "Biographical Clinics," by George M. Gould, published by Blakiston's Son & Co., 1906. Vol. IV, p. 219.





## VII: Friends and Acquaintances

Books were, however, not the sole source of Hearn's information. He always kept a weather eye out for people who had any particular knowledge of matters that interested him. While still in Cincinnati, he had read a story in *Scribner's*, by George W. Cable, called "Jean-ah Poquelin," which so fascinated him that he wanted to meet the author. So, shortly after his arrival in New Orleans, he called upon him. Although, at this time, Cable was beginning to be known in a literary way, he was still working as a clerk in some merchant's counting house so the meed of praise from the outside world fell pleasantly on his ears and he and Hearn became friends. They were about the same size, but Cable was six years older—a mild-mannered man of the physically frail type. He inherited from his New



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England mother a deep, not to say narrow, religious feeling. It was so strong in fact that in 1869, after having been an assistant-editor of the *Picayune* for only a few months, he threw up his job rather than aid the devil by editing the theatrical column. It is to be suspected that Hearn eliminated some of his usual topics of conversation when they were together, but, in spite of the barrier of a puritanism to which he was a perfect stranger, they got along well enough at first. Both were deeply interested in the same things, Creole lore and, of course, everything pertaining to literature. In the beginning, at least, they helped each other. Hearn gave copies of the Creole songs he had collected to Cable who, in return, allowed him to transcribe some of his to send to Krehbiel. In this work Cable had the advantage because he was musician enough to write the music direct from the lips of the negroes as they sung them, while Hearn had to depend on some one else to do this for him. This nettled him and he always criticized the accuracy with which Cable wrote the scores. Notwithstanding this Hearn called on Cable two or three nights a week and they found the greatest pleasure in each other's society. As they entertained similar ideas about the treatment of the negro, an additional bond was formed. At a time when the wounds of the Civil War were still unhealed, Cable had already begun to openly censure the disenfranchisement of the negro—a fight which he eventually carried into print in an article called "The Freedman's Case in Equity." Hearn's perennial sympathy with the under dog and his past connection with Althea Foley made him a quick convert to Cable's point of view, although he knew enough



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not to discuss it openly. Hearn picked up a tale along the water front and retold it to Cable—it served to strengthen their friendship. Here it is, just as Hearn wrote it to Krehbiel:

“Let me tell thee, O Bard of the Harp of a Thousand Strings, concerning a romance of Georgia. I heard of it among the flickering shadow of steamboat smoke and the flapping of sluggish sails. It has a hero greater, I think, than Bludso; but his name is lost in Southern history; yet perhaps it may be recorded on the pages of a great book whose leaves never turn yellow with Time, and whose letters are eternal as the stars. But the reason his name is not known is because he was a ‘d—d nigger.’

“The war was just over, and the Confederacy writhing its life out under the crushing heel of the North. Fugitives from the South, were seeking the sea-coast, and the negroes the far North as a haven of freedom and indolent rest. ‘Freedom’ meant to their childish minds an infinite plantation, where it was never too hot, where nobody had any work to do, where everybody had plenty to eat and to drink like the King-planters of the South, and where the Government watched over her black children like God the Father ‘leaning over his Eternity.’

“So it happened that the *General Throop* was steaming up the Savannah River one burning day, like a white palace, with her cabin full of Confederate fugitives, and her hold full of cotton, and negroes going to that vague and phantom thing called ‘freedom in the North,’ to seek new homes, and to kiss the hand of President Lincoln,—not

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knowing that Lincoln was lying in awful state, with a whole nation mourning for him at that very moment.

“Well they never saw ‘Massa Abe Lincoln’ even in the solemnity of his last sleep; for the *Throop* burst into a sheet of flame long before nearing her destination. The cotton took fire, and the white timber withered and vanished like dry leaves in the fierce heat.

“Some leaped into the river; some rushed out to the guards of the boat. These were whites. The poor black creatures below never went to ‘freedom in the North,’ but perhaps they did find freedom on a fairer plantation than the Southern sun ever shone upon, where there were no overseers, and no cotton picking under the blistering noon-day, and a Government which takes better care of them than the dead President could ever have done.

“The captain and engineers deserted the vessel; there was a panic of selfish and furious men. One man kept to his post. He was not a white man; but a d—d nigger,—a ‘yaller feller’ from Georgy. He was a free mulatto. He was the Pilot.

“The Pilot stuck to his post, and to his wheel. The smoke rolled up like the night, and the flames flickered through it like lightning; but he held on bravely. The wood-roof of the pilot-house caught the flame, the glass shattered and the frames of the windows burned; but he said nothing and kept his position.

“He was heading here into the bank, where the land was low and the groves bowed down under their ragged garments of moss. His eyes were on the Georgian shore. A few more strokes of the engines would bring her into the land. Below men

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shouted madly to him to leap for his life, but he never heard them.

"Suddenly the engines ceased to pant; their iron hearts were broken in the great heat. The cords of the tiller vanished; and the wheel turned helplessly in the Pilot's hands. But he had brought her into the bank, and the threescore souls were saved.

" 'And as for the Pilot,' said my friend, one of the saved, 'I think I was the last to see him. I watched him in the very embrace of the flames, as it seemed to me, holding on to the wheel. Against the bright glare, he seemed like a Statue of Bronze. I saw him, at last, fold his arms and wait. The pilot-house rocked and trembled and fell with a crash into the hell below. When I looked up again, the Statue was gone.' "

Both the angle from which it was told and the story itself must have pleased Cable tremendously and the fact that they were supporters of a minority theory, against large and choleric odds, tended to bring them all the closer. Hearn reinforced this first good impression by loyally singing the praises of Cable's books in the *Item*. In fact a paid publicity agent could not have done more for the "Grandissimes," as he wrote five laudatory reviews of it within two years. The favours were not all on one side however, for in 1882 Cable arranged with the *Century* to publish one of Hearn's articles called "The Scenes of Cable's Romances" and they sent Joseph Pennell down to do some illustrations. One evening during his stay Cable gave Pennell a dinner at Spanish Fort. Hearn was there. Cable told the story of the terrible disaster of "Last Island" (which Hearn was later to fashion into *Chita*), and then sang

## CAKES AND CANDY.



She buyeth little cakes and selleth them to little children.

Sometimes, especially if she be Crispin, she maketh them herself, and great is the cunning skill wherewith she prepareth the little dainties.

Then whenever little boys and girls get five cents to spare, they go to spend it at the cake-stand.

Children are the only customers:— is childhood supporting age.

Some of these ancient women have been selling dainties to little ones through two generations.

Many of the infants who trotted to them with five cents in their dimpled fingers, are now grown-up men and women.

Others have now children of their own, and these too toddle to the good old woman with their nickels.

So that the old woman knoweth much of the history of families and the vicissitudes thereof.

During the epidemic of 187-, the business was not good. Little ones who used to buy suddenly ceased to come. And many came no more.

And the aged woman, sitting in the sun, smiled not as was her wont, and spake less than usual.

Wondering what had become of her little darlings.

Of many of them she never heard again:—and never will hear, and she wonders still.

So that, asking her one day where was little fair hair baby, whom we had not seen since last summer, she answered only—

*Non Dirò, li conosco?*

One of Hearn's Illustrated Articles from the *Item*.

some of those haunting Creole negro songs with which he delighted audiences all over the country when, some years afterward, he and Mark Twain toured as a vaudeville team. About that famous expedition, by the way, many funny tales were told. Tall, thin Mark Twain with his enormous shock of hair always came onto the stage leading tiny, frail Cable by the hand and never referred to him in any way except as his little brother which always brought down the house. Clemens told stories and Cable sang Creole songs in a small high shrill voice and followed then with readings from his books, mimicking accurately the accent of a French Creole of the old school speaking English. Relations off the stage, however, were not so fraternal. Cable considered it was an unforgivable sin to travel on Sunday and, no matter where they were, how necessary it might be to get to the next place to keep their engagement or how abominable the hotel was in which they happened to have been stranded, nothing could persuade him to move on the Sabbath. Mark Twain got livid with rage and wrote their manager, Major Pond, threatening to give up the tour unless Cable's stubbornness could be overcome, but all to no purpose.

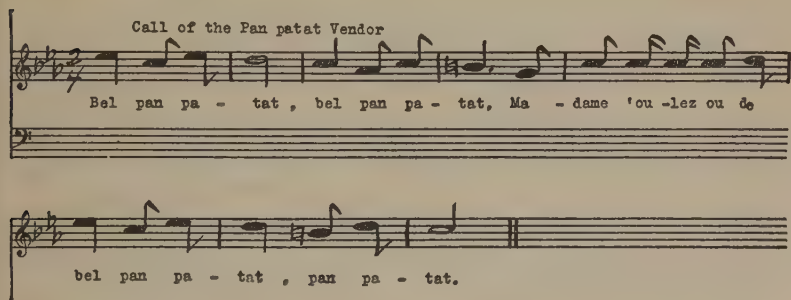
Cable was by no means Hearn's only informant on Creole tradition. Local Louisiana lore lay, for the most part, in people's memories, little of it had gotten into print, so Hearn ingratiated himself with this old person or that, gathering bits of legend and local history. He made friends with the "*bonnes vieilles negresses*" who used to sit behind little tables in public places selling delicious homemade sweetmeats—"Pralines des pacanes," "de coco," "*Bons calas tous chauds*" (a sort of doughnut made from rice-flour, shaped like a



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ball), "Bel pan patats" (little baked cakes of sweet potatoes mashed with butter and lard and seasoned with powdered cloves), "Baton d'amande" (almond stick) and "Blanches Tablettes a la Fleur d'Oranger" (delicious flat round white candies delicately flavoured with orange blossoms). They wore ample cotton skirts of "guiney blue" that spread starchily round their feet in a large circle. Over the huge expanse of their quaky bosoms was folded a simple white fichu from which rose the strong column of their ebony necks. They would just as soon have walked the streets naked as to have appeared without the brilliantly plaided tignon confining their kinky hair. Spotless they were and their pleasant smiling faces never failed to attract trade as they waved the flies off their wares with strips of bright coloured paper tied to the end of a stick.

From these old women he collected many of the proverbs that later went into "Gombo Zhèbes," and learned to chant the musical cries with which they advertised their goods, such as:



Although they gossiped willingly about everything else, when it came to a question of voodoo, their chatter ceased. It only brought bad luck to talk about it, but that mysterious and repulsive cult of devil and ser-

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pent worship was the very thing Hearn was most curious about and he pursued its unsavoury secrets relentlessly. By constant questioning he obtained the name and address of an old coloured crone who was popularly believed to be a voodoo-woman. He visited her shanty and, sitting by the fire, cajoled and bribed her until he got the information he wanted.

The record of one of these visits appeared as a paragraph in "Wayside Notes":

"It may not be generally known to New Orleans readers that at certain secret voodoo meetings still held in this city some weird ditties are sung which musical professors would give worlds to hear. After repeated and vain endeavours to obtain an entrance to one of these strange séances—a privilege which neither love or money seems able to buy—the writer of these lines finally succeeded in obtaining a private interview with one of the sable priestesses of this black Eleusis, and in persuading her to chant the voodoo incantation under promise of a little pecuniary reward. The chant was well worth its price,—being one of the weirdest and strangest performances ever heard by the writer, who had made some study of savage music before. The words—written down phonetically belong to some *baragowin* known only to the voodoo priesthood, containing vocal sounds not to be found in civilized tongues. The singer professed herself ignorant of their meaning. As arranged according to musical writers, the song appeared to have been composed in short lines like Runic verses; but a musical friend, who accompanied us, confessed himself unable to reproduce the music to which they were sung,—a great part of it being characterized

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by quarters and sixths of notes, requiring a most delicate training of the ear to memorize and note down. It seems that most of those who have written upon the subject of negro music have given little or no attention to this particular feature of it. There are little tones in the commonest roustabout song which are not to be found in civilized music and which few white throats could reproduce; and yet it is to these fractions of tones that the true negro melodies owe their peculiar wild and melancholy sweetness.”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently he was unsuccessful in discovering the meaning of this chant because a few months later the voodoo words appeared in the editorial columns.

“The following written to some extent according to Creole pronunciation, is said to be one of the Voodoo incantations. We cannot translate some of it, but hope somebody else can:

Heru mande, heru mande, heru mande,  
    Tigi li papa,  
Heru mande,  
    Tigi li papa,  
Heru mande,  
    Heru mande, heru mande,  
Do se dans godo  
    Ah tingonai ye;  
Ah tingonai ye, ah tingonai ye,  
    Ah ouai ya, ah ouai ya,  
Do se dans godo  
    Ah tingonai ye  
Tigi li papa, etc.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, June 7, 1879, “Wayside Notes.”

<sup>2</sup> *Item*, November 8, 1879.

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The minute care with which he collected and preserved every little item of interest on this subject is shown by another paragraph which also appeared in "Wayside Notes":

"A coloured woman recently arrested in St. Louis for assaulting her husband testified in extenuation of the assault that he had made a little coffin and inscribed her name on it after the Voodoo fashion. Perhaps not many of our readers are aware of the extent to which voodoo superstition exists here, not only among the coloured population, but even by contagion among the white people who should know better. Some time ago a woman informed us that shortly after discharging a coloured domestic for some misdemeanour, all the household were taken sick; and the sickness was peculiarly intermittent. By daytime everybody felt tolerably well, but immediately after retiring the illness would recommence. A ghastly exhalation seemed to emanate from the pillows, causing at once violent headache and intense fear. It occurred to the household at last that the pillows should be examined. On ripping them open they were found to contain voodoo charms,—fantastic forms made out of feathers, little coffins, and little manikins with little hands folded in the mockery of death. Salt was sprinkled upon the fetishes, which were duly consigned to the flames, and then everybody got well."<sup>1</sup>

His quest for information on this subject led him very often to frequent the society of a certain mulatress, reputed a Voodoo Queen. Her name was Marie Laveau—at this time about fifty years of age, although she

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, March 30, 1879, "Wayside Notes."

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looked much younger. A free woman of colour she had started life as a coiffeuse. The practice of her vocation gave her the entrée to almost every house, and she took advantage of this to assist young lovers (for a substantial recompense of course) by secretly carrying their letters and many an old roué owed the success of his amours to suggestions of new dresses and jewels that the adroit Marie whispered into some lovely pink ear as her deft fingers piled the dark tresses into an elaborate coiffure above it.

While her combined employments were remunerative, her ambition soared to larger things. She was perfectly unscrupulous and devilishly shrewd, so quite naturally realized the possibilities of power in voodoo. Rapidly she became the leader of this cult and gained an unseemly control over the superstitious negroes—even many of the whites were imposed upon by her clever charlatanry. Her resourcefulness was never known to fail no matter how difficult the test, as was proved in the case of a certain town drunkard for whom she was suspected to have had an amorous weakness. Early one morning after a debauch he made his way to her door-step to ask her for money with which to buy more of “the hair of the dog that bit him.” Marie to her mortification did not have a cent that day, but never at a loss, she quickly pulled him into the house and said: “If you do what I say you’ll have all the money you want in two hours.” Then, behind closed doors and shutters, feverish preparations began. The largest table was pulled into the centre of the front room and it was spread with Marie’s best white sheet which fell to the floor on all sides. Then she told the impecunious one to lay himself out on the table, decently cross his arms



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on his breast and close his eyes. She pulled down his trouser legs, arranged his coat, straightened his tie and hair to some semblance of respectability and gave to his features the pallor of death by the judicious application of flour. This done she placed a lighted candle, stuck in the bottom of a saucer (she would take no chances of grease spots on her best sheet), at each side of his head. The final touch was a generous bowl in a prominent place beside the "corpse." These preparations accomplished, Marie, leaving the shutters closed to keep the room in semi-gloom, opened the door and sat herself on the door-step weeping bitterly. In no time at all a crowd of curious sympathetic neighbours gathered around. To their fire of questions Marie stopped weeping long enough to sob, "Ah! le pauv' Michie Blanque, il est mort. Allez 'oir comme il a l'air calme!" (Poor Mr. Blank, he is dead. Go in and see how calm he looks.) "Ah! pore man no money has he to buy mass fo' hees soul!"

Sympathetic negroes, always fascinated by the trappings of death, could not resist the temptation to go in, and once inside each clinked his little contribution into the waiting bowl. As long as the crowd came the farce was continued, but as it slacked, anxious as to how much longer the dead could support his consuming thirst in immobility, she cleared out the last of her visitors and closed her doors. A hound-eared passerby might have heard, for some time after, the clink of coin as the conspirators divided their meanly gotten gains by the light of the two mortuary candles.

Marie had another cottage out on the Bayou St. John, and in the cypress swamp near she conducted at midnight her voodoo meetings. The original rites, as

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imported by way of Santo Domingo from Africa, consisted in the worship of a serpent in a box accompanied by certain sacrifices—a pure white cock or a goat—and much drinking of “tafia,” and orgiastic dancing indulged in by both men and women scantily clad in red handkerchiefs tied to a string around their middle and another piece of red cloth bound around their foreheads. The music was purely barbaric, being the rhythmic thrumming of tom-toms made from a hollowed log or a cow’s skull with skin stretched over it. This savage thumping aided by the heavy drinking of liquor kept heated in a cauldron over a central fire seemed to throw the negroes into frenzied convulsions of horrible dancing.

Marie Laveau practised the tradition of this repulsive old ceremony in its entirety, but added to it certain new features. She realized that if her pagan rites could be made less repugnant to Roman Catholics her disciples would increase in number, so she introduced the adoration of the Virgin Mary side by side with the worship of the serpent. This blasphemous sop proved most effective and her fame and power were greatly increased.

Her shrewdness was further illustrated by another innovation. She was the first of the voodooes to invite newspaper reporters, police officials and the brightest lights of the gambling fraternity to her meetings. While there was much drinking and the snake in the box and the beheaded white rooster were much in evidence the show was only a fake used as a cover to conceal her real meetings when only devotees were present. However the fact that she could secure the attendance of so many influential white men enormously helped her prestige with the negroes.

Her specialty was the manufacture and sale of

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charms. They were of two kinds—charms to bring good luck in love, politics, or business and “gris-gris.” These latter were amulets with the power of defeating evil spells aimed against their owner. The “gris-gris” were dirty little bundles of odds and ends, pieces of snake skin or teeth, dried birds’ claws, wood or bone dug from a graveyard and of course often the traditional rabbit’s foot. Frequently these bundles were wrapped round and round with string which would bring the holder good luck if wound in one direction or bad if wound in the other. When business was dull her method of speeding up sales was truly Machiavellian. In the dark of the night she used to place on the door-step of some prosperous negress a voodoo sign. The next morning the householder was horrified to discover it, and ashen with terror immediately rushed to Marie Laveau’s little house on St. Anne Street, between Rampart and Burgundy, to purchase at any price a “gris-gris” powerful enough to combat the spell that had been cast upon her and her household.

The way in which Marie had acquired that selfsame little house proved that her credulous victims were often white as well as black. The son of a certain old Creole family had been arrested for a murder of which he was actually innocent, although the crime had been committed by some of his companions. The evidence looked very incriminating, as the guilty had combined to make this boy the scape-goat. The father of the accused at his wit’s end offered Marie a handsome reward if she could secure the acquittal of his son. Marie reassured the distracted man, and when the day of the trial arrived she sallied forth early in the morning with three Guiney peppers in her mouth. Making her way into the St.

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Louis Cathedral she remained kneeling at one of the shrines for quite a while—perfectly immobile. Finally she arose and went by a back door into the Cabildo where the trial was to be held. Secretly entering the court-room, probably with the connivance of the negro porter, she hid the three peppers under the Judge's chair. The boy was acquitted and the grateful father, attributing it to the mysterious influence of the three Guiney peppers, presented the little house on St. Anne Street to Marie in fulfilment of his promise.

Here she was living when Hearn visited her and these visits can be better understood when one realizes she was no ebony hag huddled over dying embers, in a corner of a shanty, muttering dark incantations with toothless gums, not at all. She was a keen-minded, unscrupulous, resourceful yellow woman in her alert prime, doer of big business, wielder of great power. In every New Orleans house where there were negro servants, she had her minions, slavishly willing to bring her news or do her bidding. Was it surprising that such a figure should capture Hearn's peculiar imagination—that he should scent a thousand stories behind the inscrutable mask of her face and that, finally, his visits should become so frequent as to give rise to disagreeable gossip which has persisted to this day.

Rumour of the affair with Althea Foley, following him from Cincinnati, gave credence to a report that he was living with Marie Laveau. Later Page Baker branded this as a malicious lie whose only foundation was the fact that Hearn had visited her to obtain copy, just as other newspaper reporters had done, and his close association with Hearn over a period of years gave weight to his opinion. But however this may be, Hearn



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was accustomed to being the target of personal defamation and, in this case, was compensated to a certain extent by the large amount of material which he got from her and, later, embodied in magazine articles.

The same peculiar predilections that governed his choice of books controlled his selection of associates. Their standing in the social scale did not influence him at all—if only they had one qualification—that of being unusual and picturesque. At one time or another he was intimate with all sorts of strange characters—among them an old Chinese doctor from whom he unsuccessfully tried to learn Chinese, and a wandering Hindu who, coming to protest against some of his editorials on Indian questions, had stayed on to talk of Indian Temple chants, religion and literature and to teach him to pronounce correctly the “awful title, ‘Mricchakatika,’ which means ‘The Chariot of Baked Clay.’” He knew also another devotee of voodooism, Dr. John, a negro of the Congo tribe who was born in Africa. His face still bore the marks of native tattooing and the negroes feared him much both on account of his reputed voodoo powers and the biting sarcasm of his speech. Above all other things he hated mulattoes and once made a “saying” about them which was long remembered: “The mulatto is too white to be black and too black to be white; he is nothing but a mule.”

Not the least fantastic of Hearn's friendships was that with Adrian Rouquette, a Catholic priest who knew all about Indians. The padre was born in 1813 of an excellent Creole family who lived on the Bayou St. John. Parties of Choctaw Indians often landed near his house and, at the early age of five, tradition has it, he ran away to join them, but was soon rescued by



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his family. He grew up a strange wayward boy obsessed by the love of forest life. His roving inclinations disturbed his parents and he was sent away to boarding-school, but this did not seem to cure him, so he was shipped to Paris. After a year at the Imperial College of France he drifted to a college in Nantes, Brittany, and then to Rennes, where, in 1833, he finally obtained his degree. A few months of aimless wandering in France and he was back in New Orleans to again drift into his life among the Choctaws. But now he was animated by a definite driving design. During his stay in France his imagination had been completely captured by Chateaubriand's romantic and impossible story of a beautiful Indian maiden, "Atala." This influence gave form and object to the growing passions of his lusty young manhood. He determined to search for an Indian maiden as impossibly virtuous and beautiful as Chateaubriand's heroine and when he found her to marry her. This secret quest gave zest to his otherwise aimless wanderings, and he was always watching for some sign or chance word to indicate the whereabouts of his desired paragon. Finally he overheard some Indians speak of "Oushola"—the bird-singer—whose every word sounded as sweet as the note of a nightingale. He determined she should be his bride and started off to find the tepee of her father.

In time, tales of this kind become coloured with a legendary quality that raises doubts as to their complete accuracy. Especially is this true when they attach to persons about whom hangs an odour of sanctity. One wonders whether a healthy youngster of 22, more than familiar with the gaieties of Paris, really acted in quite this way. However that may be, tradition, as embalmed

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in certain pious minds, says that upon arriving at the abode of the chief, Adrian's eyes fell upon Oushola, his ears drank in a few notes of her liquid voice, and he immediately, without more ado, arranged with the Choctaw chief to become his son-in-law and started for New Orleans to obtain the consent of his parents. One wonders whether legend is correct in separating him with such ruthless promptitude from the charms of his rubescent Venus. The thought of his mother's recriminations acted like a ball and chain on his ankle and he dawdled around for a couple of months, unable to go farther. Terrible rains fell and he welcomed them for the paths became impassable. Finally the weather cleared and he took courage and resumed his journey. Just as he started he saw a file of Indians in the distance, and, like a small boy on his way home to an expected licking, he decided to investigate anything that might be an excuse for delay. Their leader was his projected father-in-law and the solemn demeanour of the band gave Rouquette an uncomfortable feeling of premonition which was justified. He learned from the chief that they were returning from the burial of Oushola whose consumption, aggravated by the spell of bad weather, had proved fatal.

Rouquette became so morose that his mother soon persuaded him to return to Paris to study law. As before, dissipation claimed him and in a short while he threw up the law and suddenly plunged into intensive literary study.

His family urged his return, and after a while spent in gathering a library, he came back to New Orleans. He continued his absorbed studies for a time, but soon

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wearied of them and drifted back into his vagrant life among the Indians.

Again he suddenly became possessed of the urge to go to Paris—this time to become an author. He was quite successful—so much so that Thomas Moore wrote of “Les Savannes” (Rouquette’s description in verse of the Louisiana swamps) that “it breathed forth the perfume of the forest flowers,” and even dubbed him the “Lamartine of America.” Two other books followed in the same year, “La Thebaide en Amerique,” a mystic poem, and its sequel, “L’Antoniade.” But, as usual, he could not stick to one thing and in 1843 he again returned to Louisiana.

The *Propagateur Catholique*, a religious weekly, secured his services as a writer. This naturally threw him into close contact with the heads of the church. Some say it was this association, others a disappointment in love, that drove him to the seminary to study for the priesthood. Probably both these things had their influence, but the chances are that the real cause lay far deeper. Adrian’s whole history proved him to have been vacillating and infirm of purpose, a mystic and a perfectly impractical dreamer. These qualities made it impossible for him to adjust himself to the complicated conditions of civilized existence and in this he closely resembled Hearn. For this reason the simplicity of savage life had an overwhelming appeal for him and he always drifted back to live among them after every short exhausting experience of civilization in Paris or New Orleans. The same causes that drew him to primitive life drew him to the priesthood. There he had no decisions to make, no battles to fight, and his goings

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and comings were all ordered from without. When one realizes he had a great fund of natural piety (which is often the accompaniment of mysticism) and an equal amount of benevolence and desire to help his fellow men, it is easy to see why he wished to take holy orders.

In 1845 Rouquette was ordained a priest and for fourteen years officiated at the St. Louis Cathedral. At the end of this period he decided to become a missionary among his Choctaws. The pious-minded speak of a message from Heaven announcing this as his vocation. One of his relatives has suggested that his liberal opinions and the anti-slavery sermons which he had preached had earned him many enemies among the clergy and the laity of New Orleans, and that conditions had become so uncomfortable that he desired to leave. What is most probable is that his responsibilities had again assumed proportions larger than he could bear and he, once more, took refuge in primitive Indian life.

At any event when Hearn arrived in New Orleans Pere Rouquette had been a missionary among the Choctaws for almost twenty years and was so beloved by them that he was called "Chata-Ima"—Choctaw-like. He had adopted the Indian dress and always wore it except when he celebrated mass.

This must have been a most impressive ceremony. At Hachunchuba in St. Tammany Parish there is still standing, in the midst of a woods, a monster live-oak, so large that in its shade hundreds may find refuge. At its foot stood the tall dominating figure of Pere Rouquette—the last of the Black-robe Fathers—dressed in a simple black soutane. He had adopted the custom of the Breton peasants among whom he had lived and he wore his hair long—flowing down to his shoulders

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and framing a fine, large-featured, kindly face enlivened by the big, darkly brilliant, quick moving eyes of the Creole. His whole picturesque figure was instinctive with a certain poetic dignity as he stood there and spoke to his people in their own Choctaw language—braves, squaws and papooses all squatting in a semi-circle round him under that enormous roof of green leaves and drooping grey Spanish moss.

After Hearn had commenced to write for the *Item*, it did not take Pere Rouquette long to discover that here was another who understood and enthused over French literature as much as he did. At first blush a friendship between these two men would have seemed an utter impossibility. The good father was a fanatic on the question of chastity—a quality of which Hearn had not a single trace. Then too there was the bar of Hearn's delusion of persecution by the Catholic Church. However they had a bond of sympathy strong enough to overcome these barriers—a love of Latin literature. It was Pere Rouquette who made the first advances and he made them in a most subtle and characteristic manner. Knowing that Hearn read all the local publications in French he wrote a poem in Gombo French dialect and published it in the *Propagateur Catholique*. It was called "Chant d'un Jeune Creole" and was dedicated,

"A mo Zami Grek-Anglé"

L.H.

(To my Greek English Friend, L.H.)

There were twenty stanzas almost impossible to read even for those who understand French, so the first may serve as an example.



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“To papa, li sorti péi-Anglé  
Mé to mama, li sorti ile la Grèce.  
Pour to vini oir moin, zami Boklé  
Li minnin toi, avek plin politesse.”

A rough translation reads:

Your father came from England but your mother came from Greece. Should you come to see me, friend Buckley will escort you with every courtesy.

It goes on to say that the poor priest would be glad to receive the great writer in his house and would tell him of the life of the woods and the Indians and the tales of other days.

An intimate friendship sprang up between this seemingly incompatible pair, and Hearn cherished the idea of accepting the good Father's invitation to pay him a visit at Hachunchuba, among his Indians. While there is no record that this plan was carried out, still, it is certain, that they often met in New Orleans. Here Pere Rouquette kept an ascetic room at the Presbytery furnished only with a cot, two chairs and a long table, groaning under piles of books which overflowed onto the floor in many scattered heaps. Hearn often called there and they talked the whole night through—religion, mysticism, great names in French literature or Indian custom, which had been a life study with the Abbé. When they had finished, every square inch of the floor, not already covered with books, was strewn with burnt match-ends used to fire Hearn's everlasting pipe or to relight Rouquette's cigarette grown cold in the heat of argument. Hearn became fond of the old man,

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called him a "good old soul" and got much information about Indian music and songs for his friend Krehbiel, to whom he wrote that,

"If the columns of a good periodical were open to me, I should write the romance of his life—inspired by the magical writings of Chateaubriand in the commencement; and latterly devoted to a strangely beautiful religion of his own—not only the poetical religion of *ATALA* and *LES NATCHEZ*, but the religion of the wilderness which flies to solitude and hath no temple other than the vault of heaven itself, painted with the frescoes of the clouds and illuminated by the trembling tapers of God's everlasting altar, the stars of the firmament."

When in 1879 the old priest felt moved to publish a book called "*La Nouvelle Atala*," he sent the advance sheets to Hearn who promptly published a most laudatory review in the *Item*. He wrote in part:

"We have before us the advance pages of a romance which we do not hesitate to term the most idyllic work in the literature of La.—a creation inspired by the Spirit of forest solitudes,—a prose poem melodious as an autumn wind chanting a language, mystic and unwritten, through woods of pine. Fresh and pure as that unfettered wind, fragrant as wild flowers, there is a strange charm about this story unlike anything perhaps, except the magic of Chateaubriand. . . .

"None but one whose life had been passed in communion with nature and all her moods could have written such a book;—it seems to have the very odour of a pine forest; and on turning its pages a

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breeze from the prairie seems to aid the fingers of the reader.

"Aside from the religious idea which permeates, like a leaven, the whole structure of the volume, 'La Nouvelle Atala' offers a curious study from a purely literary point of view. It reflects the spirit of a life,—a most unique and strange life, such as will doubtless never be lived again in this country; the life of a missionary so enamoured with nature and solitude, and of the simple and healthy existence of those who call him Black-robe Father, that he has become even as one of them, as an Indian appellation teaches us;—a priest whose temple is the forest, with the cloud-frescoed heaven for its roof, and for its aisles, the pillared magnificence of the pines,—whose God is the God of the Wilderness, the Great Spirit overshadowing the desert," etc., etc.<sup>1</sup>

This review so pleased the author that he had it printed in its entirety in an addenda to his book.

What occurred to end this friendship will never be known. That something happened is certain, for although Pere Rouquette did not die until 1887 there is no mention of him in Hearn's letters or articles after he went to work for the *Times-Democrat* in 1881. Hearn's friendships were always evanescent and the most trivial incidents often served to turn his affection to bitter enmity. He had considered Rouquette's spelling of Gombo French very incorrect so it is more than probable that an acrimonious disagreement on this subject may have caused the rupture.

Hearn had obtained from his strangely assorted

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, February 25, 1879, "A Louisiana Idyl."

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friends and acquaintances much interesting information. But now he was about to make new ones who, although they did not supply him with literary material, were to be of far more assistance in furthering his career. Of these Page Baker was the most important.





### VIII: On the *Times-Democrat*

TOWARD the end of 1881 Major E. A. Burke, who owned a large interest in the *Democrat*, conceived the idea that if it was consolidated with the *Times* the most powerful paper in the South could be developed. Being a man of action the Major soon arranged all the details of the merger and picked as his chief executive Page Baker, a man of courage and thorough newspaper training. Hearn always thought he looked Mephistophelian on account of his hawk nose and goatee, and he described him, years afterwards, as "noble and lovable, a tall, fine, eagle-faced fellow—a primitive Aryan type."

Baker took hold immediately and turned his attention to gathering a staff of the most brilliant literary minds to be found in the South. He could not very well overlook Hearn, whose work on the *Item* had, by



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that time, won him a large group of admirers all through Louisiana. His fame had been very much increased by certain extra work he had been doing for the *Democrat* while still holding his position of assistant-editor of the *Item*.

Hearn's connection with the *Democrat* started soon after the terrible "débâcle" of the "Hard Times." In the effort to retrieve his fallen fortunes and pay his debts, he had submitted certain of his translations which had been accepted and the enthusiasm with which they were received gave him the idea that a successful Sunday feature could be made by using two or three columns of translations from French literary journals interspersed with translations from Spanish and Mexican newspapers. It was of no use to present this scheme to the *Item*—they were already paying him all they could afford—so he suggested it to the *Democrat*, and that paper accepted with alacrity. So, as a consequence, Hearn, while still keeping his position on the *Item*, began to prepare in his spare time two or three columns for the *Democrat* each week. It was on Sunday, May 16th, 1880, that his first contribution under the new arrangement appeared, headed,

### "FOREIGN FACTS AND FANCIES

Being gleanings from  
our French and Spanish Mails

---

Artistic, Literary, Political Gossip"

---

Then followed two columns of translations so well chosen that even to-day they make interesting reading.

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On the next Sunday, however, the heading was changed to what was to become its permanent form—

### “THE FOREIGN PRESS.”

This feature was an immediate success and was filled, week by week, with translations of dramatic little episodes taken from books by Gautier, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Flaubert, Zola, Loti and Sardou, sandwiched in between paragraphs of literary criticism and gossip from such French magazines as *Le Voltaire*, *Le Monde Illustré* or *L'Illustration*; the whole spiced with legends and tales of adventure culled from Spanish and Mexican papers. Of course the French translations predominated—“Pictures,” as Hearn described them in his headlines, “Glowing with Warmth and Light and that Sun-Paint which only Latin Writers know how to use.”

Baker judged very correctly that the Latin-loving population of New Orleans was hungry for more of this kind of thing, so meeting Charles Donnaud on the street one day, he said, “Bring your friend Hearn in to see me, I want to talk to him.” The next day Hearn called on Baker, who offered him the position of literary-editor of the new paper. The understanding was that he would continue to do the “Foreign Press for the consolidated paper just as he had done for the *Democrat* and, in addition, would write special short articles to appear on Sundays and on two or three other days. For these services he was to receive a salary of \$30 per week—which of course was more than the struggling *Item* could afford to pay.

On December 4th, 1881, the first issue of the new *Times-Democrat* appeared. Page Baker was editor-

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in-chief, his brother Marion was Sunday editor, and another brother, Henry, was business and advertising manager. Hearn occupied the position of literary editor and translator; George Dupré, who had been one of the owners of the *Democrat*, joined the new force as managing-editor; while his brother-in-law, John Augustin, who had also been interested in the *Democrat*, became the city-editor and, in addition, wrote the "Dramatic and Musical Criticisms." He had already made a local reputation as a poet by a thin little volume called "War Flowers," born of his experiences as an officer in the Confederate Army. Of excellent family he was a Creole of the Creoles, steeped in the tradition of that race. He was a lover of music and poetry, had a "caressing abysmal voice," and his manners were punctilious to a degree only known in places where the code of the duello is still in force. In fact he was considered a leading authority on all questions concerning it and was in demand as a second.

A New England lawyer, Charles Whitney, who had forsaken his profession to live in New Orleans, was also on the staff. He had an excellent mind and a direct style. His fascinated interest in the tradition of the city was reflected in a series of entertaining Creole sketches, while his "Tales of the Chata" (Choctaws) were delightful pictures of Indian life in Colonial Louisiana.

By far the most picturesque member, however, was Honoré Burthe—a most lovable and attractive man. He was a direct descendant of one of Napoleon's marshals which probably accounted for the fact that although born and brought up in Louisiana, he went to France and graduated from the Military College of St. Cyr.

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Later his adventurous spirit and French traditions drew him to Mexico to serve as an officer in Maximilian's ill-fated campaign. At its tragic conclusion he returned to New Orleans to live. His delightful personality, absolute courage and distinction of manner made such an impression on Page Baker that he made him a member of his staff.

These were the men who were to be Hearn's associates for the next five years. Their culture and tastes were sufficiently literary to have afforded him a sympathetic companionship. But he was friendly with only a few and to some among them, more especially Whitney, he took an unreasonable dislike, the basis of which was his envy and jealousy of their savoir faire and ability to shine socially. Therefore it was Page Baker who became Hearn's special guardian angel—a post he was perfectly willing to fill because he realized that in Hearn he had secured a wonderful literary machine and that, like most highly organized mechanisms, it needed the care of a skilled mechanic in order to give the best results. This care he gave and saw to it that Hearn was never burdened with hack-work. Next he made a careful study of Hearn's peculiarities and here he found a most fertile field. Hearn was sensitive, suspicious and downright queer—much given to finding slight or insult where none had been intended. He nursed these fancied hurts for days and refused to speak to or look at the person he held responsible. At times he was thrown into towering rages by trifles which, to most people, would have seemed unimportant. These paroxysms unfitted him for work for days and he talked in the wildest manner during such times, calling down upon the head of the offender the most gruesome and

My eyes are bothering me  
again, a little. Can't do any outside  
work for a while. And the blues I've  
had for six weeks! Too much  
— a monotonous and isolation from  
mankind. I'm going to take a  
rest. It's awful dull, horribly  
dark, disgustingly warm, diabolically  
uninteresting. The same thing every  
day — stagnant as one of those thick  
green pools in which the throwing  
of a stone can scarcely make  
a ripple. I'm just vegetating  
, taking root in the slimy soil; —  
after a little while the sedge-grass  
will be sprouting through the  
top of my head. Feel like  
a mandrake — couldn't shriek  
unless I was "torn from the earth."

Bye-bye  
Merry Christmases ad libitum





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horrible of vengeance—luckily far beyond his powers of accomplishment. If Baker himself ever deleted or changed a sentence in one of his articles, Hearn avoided him for weeks and blackguarded him outrageously, saying Baker had suppressed the best part of his writings out of a cowardly fear that some advertiser would be offended.

Baker realized all these peculiarities and took the most minute precautions to secure Hearn's peace of mind. For instance, he knew Hearn had an obsession that much of the beauty and lucidity of his writing depended entirely upon his punctuation and that nothing so aggravated him as to have any of his marks changed, so Baker issued orders that any typesetter who, whether by carelessness or design, changed any of his punctuation marks would be instantly dismissed. When he gave up sick or discouraged, it was Baker who sent him away on a holiday or heartened him into new interest in his work, and it was really this encouragement that kept Hearn sending his articles and books to Northern magazines and publishers in spite of many rejections. Baker even advised him on money matters and, after much effort, instilled some rudimentary ideas of thrift into a mind which had been as empty of this quality as a gourd.

It was in this atmosphere of sympathetic understanding and encouragement that the bud of Hearn's genius came to full bloom, and he was happier then than at any other time of his life—at least in after years he spoke of the keen pleasure he derived from sitting round Baker's office and hearing him read aloud one of his "vagaries" from proofs still smelling of ink, which had just come down from the press room.

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His work was very different now. At the *Item* he had been more versatile, combining in one small person, as we know, the duties of columnist, editorial writer, exchange-editor, dramatic critic, book-reviewer, illustrator and translator. Now he did not deal with questions of local interest such as police corruption or the imbecilities of the Board of Health, for his work was entirely confined to subjects of a literary flavour—occasional editorials and the “FOREIGN PRESS.” This had been continued in the *Times-Democrat* in the same form in which it had appeared in the *Democrat* and not a Sunday had been missed by the change. Indeed its popularity became so great that it ran, without a break, for the whole five and one-half years that he worked on the paper.

For some time an intellectual change had been gradually coming over him. The greater leisure which he now enjoyed gave him more time for study and his larger salary permitted him to buy more books. As his library increased, he more and more withdrew from contact with the world into an atmosphere created entirely from his strange books. This change was reflected in his choice of matter for translation. No more did translations from Spanish or Mexican papers appear in “FOREIGN PRESS,” instead it became more and more literary in flavour until it was narrowed to include only excerpts from foreign authors or articles appearing in the French reviews about Continental writers. It developed, finally, into a most subtle system for whetting the Louisiana appetite for French literature. Each Sunday an essay appeared on the editorial page under some such caption as “A Mad Romantic” or “The Idol of a Great Eccentric.” This invariably contained a fas-

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cinating account of some author, compounded in a manner so piquant, of equal proportions of biography, bibliography, skilful criticism and literary gossip, that it never failed to inoculate its readers with an irresistible desire to read, immediately, something by the author discussed. This yearning was never permitted to go unsatisfied, for he always placed in the same issue, under the heading of "FOREIGN PRESS" some little gem by the same author, complete in itself, which he had translated without the slightest loss of savour, colour, rhythm, grace or atmosphere—just a sufficient amount to give the spirit of that particular writer.

The method was subtle, but of an unconscious subtlety born of Hearn's own personal love of them. Under his direction the "FOREIGN PRESS" became a veritable grab-bag of unexpected delights, French authors, of course, supplying the bulk of the prizes. Of these de Maupassant appeared most often with Pierre Loti a close second, while Flaubert, Flammarton, Baudelaire, Coppée, Daudet, Gerard de Nerval, Michelet and Zola divided equal honours. Others there were also, less well known, such as Charles Baissac, the Mauritian, who wrote of a subject that always fascinated Hearn—the Creole Language and Lore.

There was never any monotony of fare, for he carefully watched the French journals and books for translations from other literatures, European or Oriental, which often appeared in them. These he turned into English and so was able to serve the highlights of the contemporary literature of almost the whole world—or to be more accurate, of that part of it which held an appeal for him. On this last point he was both selfish and adamant, for no consideration of the possible tastes

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of his public could ever persuade him to publish anything of which he did not approve. Fragments of Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, German, Russian, Arabic, Swedish, Italian, Austrian, Jewish and East Indian writings gave colour to his columns. It was a five-year feast where, to be sure, only literary hors d'œuvres were served—but such delicious exotic hors d'œuvres, the best to be procured from every corner of the globe—just a tid-bit of each, sufficient to whet the appetite for a full meal.

By these methods Hearn accomplished something never before done in the United States—he successfully popularized foreign literature through the medium of a daily newspaper. But his success never made him careless either in his choice of subject-matter or slipshod in the technique of translating. His literary conscience was supersensitive on the question of the ethical duty of the translator to keep intact all the charm, colour, grace and nuance that the original might have. During the time he had been on the *Item* his ire had been terribly aroused by some translations of Zola and Flaubert done by one John Sterling and published by T. B. Peterson Bros. of Philadelphia. They were inaccurate, stupidly expurgated, slovenly, absolutely untrue to the originals and whole pages of the French had been omitted. Zola's novel "Une Page d'Amour" had actually appeared under the English title of "The Amours of a Page." In a series of editorials Hearn ruthlessly flayed both the translator and the publisher, for he felt that irremediable harm was being done to those Frenchmen whose works were translated in this dreadful manner. Especially did this seem cowardly to him, for, due to the absence of any international copy-



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right laws in those days, these poor mutilated authors were without defence or redress, and what added poignancy to the sting was the fact that he considered a death blow had been struck at all taste for French literature in the United States.

His preoccupation with the art of translating continued on the *Times-Democrat* and was reflected in another series of editorials of a much more scholarly character than those which appeared in the *Item*.<sup>1</sup> In one he unmasked a contributor to the *Arkansas Traveller* who had been publishing in that paper alleged original translations from the Sanskrit which were, in reality, shamelessly cribbed from a European scholar; while in another<sup>2</sup> he displayed real erudition in a comparison of the merits of English, French and German translations of Oriental classics.

One editorial in particular is of importance because it gives the most graphic picture of the spirit of artistic conscientiousness with which he approached his work and the laborious travail of soul which gave birth to his translations. It was called:

### "FOR THE SUM OF \$25"<sup>3</sup>

"When an attempt is made to make anything like a fair estimate of the labour needed to effect a faithful and meritorious translation of the great masters of the French language, we cannot imagine it possible to translate more than five or six pages a

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, January 30, 1880, "Translating and Mutilating;" January 28, 1881, "Madame Bovary;" January 30, 1881, "Some American Translations;" January 31, 1881, "How Sterling Translates Zola."

<sup>2</sup> *Times-Democrat*, July 4, 1886, "Some Supposed Sanskrit Translations;" June 18, 1884, "Verse and Prose Translations."

<sup>3</sup> *Times-Democrat*, September 24, 1882.



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day (long primer, leaded, 16mo). For it is by no means sufficient to reproduce the general meaning of the sentence:—it is equally necessary to obtain a just equivalent for each word, in regard to force, colour, and form;—and to preserve, so far as possible, the original construction of the phrase, the peculiarity of the rhetoric, the music of the style. And there is a music in every master style,—a measured flow of words in every sentence;—there are alliterations and rhythms; there are onomatopœias; there are tints, sonorities, luminosities, resonances. Each word in a phrase is a study in itself, and a study in its relation to other words in the phrase; and the phrase in its relation to the sentence and the sentence in its relation to the paragraph, and the paragraph in its relation to other paragraphs. Then besides precise shades of meaning must be studied, harmonies of tones and their relation to other tones, and their general interrelation with the music of the entire idea. A most laborious, cautious, ingenious, delicate and supple work;—a work demanding perhaps even a greater knowledge of one's own language than of the French tongue,—a work to be aided, not by French dictionaries, but by English dictionaries of synonyms and derivations and antonyms and technicalities and idioms and rhymes. A work requiring intense application, wearisome research and varied linguistic powers. A work of giants, indeed;—easily flowing as its results may seem to careless eyes thereafter;—eyes unable to analyze the secret of the art that pleases them. There is no more difficult and scholarly task than to translate perfectly a masterpiece from one tongue to another. Wherefore the proverbs—French,

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Spanish and Italian:—*traduire c'est trahir; traductor, traidor, and traduttore traiditore*, synonymizing 'translator' and 'traitor.' Faithless indeed must be the translator who imagines that he can produce in one week or one month a fair translation of some work which cost its author years of literary labour.

"And this very new school of French literature,—the school of Daudet, Goncourt, Zola and Flaubert,—so ruthlessly treated by persons who produce these bogus translations, is that which of all others demands the most careful labour. The sense, forms, force, sonority, colour of every word must be studied; the shape of every phrase chiselled out; the beauty of every naked sentence polished like statuary marble. Men have killed themselves at this terrible literary labour, so utterly ignored by American translators. One of the brothers Goncourt perished from the nervous exhaustion entailed by intense application. And it is such works as this, the labour of years,—work produced in nervous tortures, prostrating fatigues, brain agonies unspeakable,—a work of blood and tears,—a work in whose every line quivers the vitality of the creator,—that some vulgar scribbler sits down to translate at a bar-room table under a contract to complete the task in one week for the sum of \$25."

It was a cry from the heart and a complete revelation of the "nervous tortures" he had undergone and of his own meticulous drudgery in the pursuit of this "giant's work." When he wrote this, he probably had in mind those nights in Cincinnati which he spent polishing and repolishing his translations of Théophile Gautier's stories till every phrase was emery-smooth and

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adequate—as full of colour as its gorgeous original. He had tried to publish them in book form without success. Gautier's "Arria Marcella" and "A Mummy's Foot" had appeared in the *Item* and the reception given them in Latin New Orleans had encouraged him to try again to obtain a publisher. But there were no local ones and the rest of the country was Anglo-Saxon and Mid-Victorian, so he had failed once more. He was discouraged, yet never doubted the correctness of his opinion that Gautier was a great writer who would, some day, be appreciated in the United States and that "One of Cleopatra's Nights" was worth translating because it was "a tremendous, archæologic fantasy, painted with luxurious power."

The *Times-Democrat* had jumped to importance and become the most influential paper in the South and Southwest. With this much larger audience Hearn's popularity as a writer had correspondingly increased. This inspired him to send out again the little volume of Gautier translations. This time he persuaded R. Worthington to publish it in New York, but it was not a cheap victory even then, for Hearn had to advance \$150 to help defray the first expenses.

The painstaking care which he had devoted to these tales and the amount of collateral reading and study which he had done, can be guessed from the following letter he wrote to Page Baker:

"My dear Mr. Baker:—

"It has taken me all the afternoon to examine facts regarding that MS., and I must beg you to excuse me from reading it through. It would take a long time, and hurt my eyes more than any amount of print.

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"Cleopatra was not born in Greece, but in Alexandria. Fourteen different Cleopatras are mentioned in Classic history. This Cleopatra ranks tenth among princesses of the name. She was the daughter of Ptolemy Auletes; or, 'Ptolemy the Piper.' The Ptolemies claimed Macedonian descent; the 1st. Ptolemy being a successor to Alexander, getting Egypt for his share. But as the 'Piper' was himself an illegitimate son of Ptolemy Lathyrus, there is much reason to doubt whether Cleopatra possessed pure Greek blood. History grants her beauty; though the famous coin gives her a profile the reverse of beautiful or even pleasing. But there is no just reason to consider her fair-skinned or fair-haired, especially the latter. Plutarch even says that 'Her beauty was not so remarkable that nothing could be compared with it.'—her charms lay in her coquettishness, sweet voice, (compared to 'a many stringed instrument') her extraordinary talents, and her knowledge of languages. I can find no authority for the idea that she was ever in Greece before meeting Antony. The Smith Encyclopedists never hint of it. Venetian or other painters may represent Cleopatra with tawny gold hair; but the historical probability is that her skin was dark enough and her hair quite as black as the blackest Italian tresses. Fair hair, even among the Greeks of to-day, is rare; and the history of Cleopatra inclines one to believe that a darker blood ran in her veins. The first Cleopatra who married a Ptolemy was a Syrian.

"Poetical license may be allowed in regard to colour, but not as to date and positive historical fact. Cleopatra saw Greece, as she saw Rome and Judea for a brief while; but she was certainly born a

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daughter of Egypt—in the year B.C. 69—and her first visit to Greece was on a spree with Antony.

### Authorities.

Smith's Encyc. Vol. IV.

Michelet, "Roman Rep."

Froude, "Cæsar."

J. S. C. Abbott "Cleopatra."

Plutarch, "Antony."

Suetonius, "Cæsar."

"Dion Cassius speaks lengthily of Cleopatra; but I do not think he describes her complexion any more fully. I have no copy of his work."

This first-born book of Hearn's appeared in 1882 and, as was to be expected, created a tremendous discussion. The majority tagged it "lewd and licentious" as was natural in that day and age. The *Observer* with unrivalled discernment declared it was a collection of stories of "unbridled lust without the apology of natural passion," that it "reeked with the miasmas of the brothel." Only a few perceived the true beauty of both the original and the translation.

Nevertheless, the reputation he derived from it so added to the popularity of his Sunday translations in the *Times-Democrat*, that rival papers were driven to envious emulation. Both the *States* and the *Picayune* began to publish translations from the French. This, of course, gave Hearn the keenest joy and the opportunity to pick flaws in their versions again and again and to ridicule them in the editorial columns of his paper.<sup>1</sup>

These telling thrusts lacerated the pride of the *States*

<sup>1</sup> *Times-Democrat*, June 16, 1886. "Specimens of What the *Picayune* Does Not Want Credit For."



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and they finally issued a challenge for a competition between their translator and that of the *Times-Democrat*. The public reply which the editor of the *Times-Democrat* made through the columns of his paper left no doubt as to the opinion they held of the prowess of Hearn. Said the editor "modestly":

"The *Times-Democrat* must be excused from accepting the challenge thrown down by the *States* to enter into a competition for the purpose of testing the ability of its translator as compared with that of the translator of the *States* and the *Picayune*.<sup>1</sup>

"While the proposition may be attractive to the *States*, we can scarcely consent to ask our translator, whose ability as a French and English scholar is known and appreciated in literary circles throughout this country, and who has won, from competent critics, both in Europe and America, the highest encomiums, to enter into a purely local contest with rivals who have yet their spurs to win.

"If the challenge could be made broader, so as to be national in its scope, the *Times-Democrat* would gladly accept it and back its translator, Mr. Lafcadio Hearn, against the most accomplished in the country.

"There are not many journals or magazines in the United States that have translators of purely literary articles on their staffs, else the *Times-Democrat* would issue a challenge to the press of the country in the matter of French translations."

Hearn's contributions were, by no means, restricted to translations and literary editorials. He had wan-

<sup>1</sup> *Times-Democrat*, June 16, '86.

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dered deep into the realms of folklore, as a paragraph which appeared in the first issue of the *Times-Democrat* showed. Under the headline, "Ancient Wit and Wisdom," was collected a series of proverbs culled from the Chinese, Russian, Gaelic, Turkish, Nubian, Tamul, Urad, Sanscrit, Badaga, Cingalese, Kroumir, Persian, Afghan, Arabic and Teligu—rather a tour de force in catholicity. But this was merely a by-product of his reading, what he was really trying to produce was something much more important. As usual his method of approach was laborious but thorough. Choosing some legend which especially appealed to his exotic imagination, from among the little known literatures such as the Buddhist, Esquimau, Runic or Talmudic, he collected all the books he could find on the subject. Often he consulted thirty or forty authorities before he was satisfied that he had obtained every version of the tale. The result of this painstaking and minute study he formed into patterns so beautiful and new, gave them so much of the bloom of his own enthusiasms, that work, which in another might be accounted mere translation, became Hearn's own and can justly be classed as original.

The shimmering lovely tales he fashioned came closer to the real spirit and feeling of the centuries old original than the version of any of the acknowledged students who supplied the sources of his inspiration. He worked ceaselessly to arrive at a musical quality in his phrase, and harmony of sound became his touchstone. It might almost be said that he wrote by ear, for when a friend<sup>1</sup> once asked him whether he had not made a careful study of the laws of grammar, he replied:

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Louis Claudel of New Orleans.

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"Not a bit of it! I don't know anything about them. If a phrase or sentence sounds right or beautiful to my ear then I accept it because I know it is correct."

Dr. Gould in his book denied emphatically that Hearn had any claim to scholarship. But any one who knew the unflagging and intelligent industry, the enthusiasm and research that went into the making of these short tales, must realize the injustice of such a charge. To be true he studied only such subjects or parts of subjects as interested him. But is there anything in that which is unscholarly, if he pursued those questions thoroughly and painstakingly (which was the case)?

The world has believed so long that a certain mental aridity and even incomprehensibility is the necessary earmark of a student that it instinctively denies scholarship to the producer of beauty. If Hearn had written a dry-as-dust bibliography, a mere catalogue of the various authorities which he had consulted, and then had shown the minute ways in which they had disagreed, in the eyes of the world and of Dr. Gould, he would have been considered a scholar. But because he consulted all these same authorities, noted their discrepancies and instead of listing all these, he chose to hide the dry bones of his industry under the glamor of his words so that only the finished work of art was visible; to construct something accurate but beautiful and shining, that bridged the gap of centuries and made men of to-day understand and admire the thoughts and achievements of men of other races long since dead; because he did these things in this way, are we then to say he was no scholar? This would be manifestly unfair and would tend to set a premium upon the tedious cataloguers of unimportant detail.

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Hearn wrote all of these tales with the ultimate idea of collecting them in a book so, while drawn from many diverse literatures, they were homogeneous in form and treatment. As each one was finished it appeared in the *Times-Democrat*—a sort of dress rehearsal that gave him one more opportunity to refine before it came out in collected form. It was not until 1884, however, that he was able to obtain a publisher. In that year he sent a collection of twenty-seven of the best of them to James R. Osgood and Co. of Boston, who published them under the title of “Stray Leaves from Strange Literatures.” Hearn best described their character when he said in his introduction: “. . . these fables, legends, parables, etc., are simply reconstructions of what impressed me as most fantastically beautiful in the most exotic literature which I was able to obtain.” The book was dedicated to Page Baker as it was entirely through his efforts that it got a hearing from Osgood. In fact, they had already rejected it when an enthusiastic letter from Baker resulted in a reconsideration.

One other accomplishment of that same year filled Hearn with almost as much pride and pleasure. For Pierre Loti he had the most unbridled enthusiasm. His amorous adventures with women of tropic climes were the sort of experiences Hearn craved and the polish and beauty of his literary style was exactly that for which Hearn was striving. As Loti’s various books appeared Hearn had served up some of their episodes in the *Times-Democrat*. Now he started a correspondence with him with a view to having him contribute some Oriental sketches. Loti agreed—for \$75 per column—and Hearn was very much cast down when Baker said it would not pay to employ him at that figure.

In the Name of the Most-  
merciful God!

Dear K. (Private)

"Stray Leaves" &c have  
been accepted by Jas. R. Osgood  
& Co. Congratulate your  
little Dreamer of monstrous  
Dreams.

Aschaduan na Mohammed  
Rasoul Allah!

Bismillah.

Allah-hu akbar!

Hearn's Letter to Krehbiel Announcing the Publication of "Stray Leaves."



## On the *Times-Democrat*

Hearn continued his correspondence with Loti and finally, perhaps out of gratitude for the many laudatory editorials Hearn had written about him, he sent some unpublished leaves from his note-book of Oriental experiences. With what care and enthusiasm did Hearn translate them! He almost burst with quiet pride when on December 28th, 1884, the *Times-Democrat* appeared with great blare of trumpets, carrying a full page of translations from the "Note Books of Pierre Loti."

While this was a "beat" and a big one, Hearn did not in any way relax his own efforts. To his fertile mind came many subjects and everything he touched with his pen became immediately interesting because he permeated it with his own personality. His habit, while composing, was to walk up and down the cocoa matting of the *Times-Democrat* office, perfectly oblivious to everything around him, until his subject had been entirely planned in his mind. That done, he stood up beside the jamb of the door, holding the long sheets of yellow paper pressed to the lintel, and wrote for hours. Heterogeneous articles flowed from his pen—"The Hypocrisy of the Face," "The Roar of a Great City," "The Jew upon the Stage," "Men with Tails," many contributions on the Mahdi who was then filling the front pages of Continental journals with news of the uprising, discussions of Creole Literature, Language and Proverbs, treatises on scientific questions such as "The Quivering of the World's Skin" and "The Exploding Comet" and finally he wrote so much about Buddhism and Theosophy that the *Times-Democrat* was branded as an "infidel sheet" from the pulpits of New Orleans.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

He took trips to other parts of Louisiana and recorded the impressions received from a visit to a Malay village called St. Malo, a short way down the river from New Orleans.

“Louisiana is full of mysteries and surprises. Within fifty miles of this huge city, in a bee line southwest, lies a place as wild and weird as the most fervent seekers after the curious could wish to behold,—a lake village constructed in true Oriental style, and equally worthy of prehistoric Switzerland or modern Malacca. Probably the public were astounded to read in our issue of Wednesday last, that there had existed for nearly two generations, almost at the outskirts of New Orleans, a real Malay village whereof the existence had been all the while almost unknown within the city. We must say almost, because a most enterprising Jewish pedlar paddled his way down there some six or seven years ago, and was able to sell a large portion of his stock without trouble;—the first and last commercial traveller who ever visited that extraordinary village within the memory of its oldest inhabitants. We may doubt whether in the *Universal Geography* of the United States there can be discovered elsewhere such an extraordinary instance of an outlandish colony of Orientals existing only a few miles from a metropolis, and unknown to the citizens of the latter. Less than twenty leagues from streets illuminated by the Brush light stands an aquatic settlement where tallow dips are luxuries and where fires are never kindled except for the purpose of smoking fish,—where the days of the week have to be noted upon the wall by some veritable Robinson Crusoe, lest Time should be no

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more, where a glass window is a thing to wonder at,—where furniture has never been seen,—where crabs devour domestic animals and alligators crawl up and down the front steps of the houses!

“There are some queer old cities in Spain, not mentioned in the great guide-books, which are so difficult to find, even after one visit, that a superstitious traveller might well imagine them to be phantom cities,—appearing to human eyes but once every hundred years. They are loftily situated in the mountains, but are so folded over and tucked in by the wrinkles of the hills that from the valleys none can perceive them. The like isolation of our Malay settlement is due to natural causes alone, but of a stranger sort. It is situated in a peculiarly chaotic part of the world, where definition between earth and water ceases,—an amphibious land full of quiverings and quagmires, suited rather to reptile life than to human existence,—a region wan and doubtful and mutable as that described in ‘The Passing of Arthur,’ ‘where fragments of forgotten peoples dwell . . . a coast of ever shifting sand, and, far away, the phantom circle of a moaning sea.’ He who desires a lodge in some vast wilderness may easily rent such a lodge at St. Malo,—and he will find the wilderness vast enough for all intents and purposes,—rushes, slough, grass higher than a man, a desolation stretching to the very edge of the Southern horizon where a thin blue line of low trees hems it all in like a boundary.

“Under a summer sun it is a jungle as wild as anything Javanese; every pool reflects the heat in sheet lightning; the grey mud cracks and crusts, till its surface resembles the backs of many alliga-

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tors. The bayou is cool and polished, like steel. There are few distinct sounds, save, perhaps, the shriek of a plover; the mournful whistle of marsh birds;—like the vain summons of lost travellers for some one who will never respond. But of ghostly sounds there are not a few;—the reeds clatter their long lances faintly together; the tall grass rustles with imperceptible currents of cold air from the shaded sloughs. Nature by day, seems to be afraid to speak in a loud voice there; she whispers only. And the brown Malays,—for ever face to face with her solitude,—also talk in low tones as through sympathy,—tones taught by the lapping of sluggish waters, the whispering of grasses, the murmuring of the vast marsh. Unless an alligator show his head;—then it is a shout of ‘Miro!—cuidado!’

“But after the sun is sunk, redder than blood, below the pointed reeds; and the crimson fires have quite faded out of the sky,—then, indeed, do innumerable millions of voices make themselves loudly heard. The roaring of a great sea is not more imposing than the mighty orchestra of frogs—the chorus rolls up to heaven deeper than the deepest pipe tones of innumerable cathedral organs. Also the air vibrates with innumerable wings; millions of singing insects that make a thick mist against the face of the moon. Mysterious creatures move here and there, parting the reeds as they go; fish leap under the stars. One rifle shot fired over the marsh and the great frog chorus stops!—only the insect music pertinaciously continues. Nothing could seem stranger than the effect of that shot;—the marshes become as silent as though the world had been suddenly killed. A long pause, and they

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begin again:—cautiously at first, then more boldly, until the roar of Niagara is rivalled.

“It is an easy sail from the great city; yet the place is as dead to the civilized world as the heart of Cambodia; there are no newspapers or telegraphs, no courts, no laws, no police, no hotels, no barrooms, no spirits, no churches, no missionaries, no women! There are shot-guns however, and spiked clubs for crushing the skulls of alligators; there are canoes, boats, nets and moss mattresses.

“These things alone connect those brown people with the age of progress. How Doré would have delighted to sketch these houses! He would have idealized them, of course, in his own peculiar way; he would have heightened them enormously and fantastically; he would have made the ruined wharves fearfully grotesque, and draped them with masses of ragged netting, like gigantic cobwebs; he would have put a huge and gibbous moon just at the edge of one of those mouldering roofs which are so curiously and Orientally curved;—he would have made that bayou scaly with alligators, and conjured snakes to twine about the pile work of the aquatic houses; he would have rendered the strange population still more strange, and the marsh more vast and wan, and the lights and shadows full of sinister suggestions. But the green-grey reality is weird enough for this earth; and as no pencil might describe the writhing of the reeds, neither might any musician record that chorus of myriads of billions of frogs, all crying out under the night together.”<sup>1</sup>

This fragment shows to a marked degree the skill Hearn had attained in sustaining an atmosphere of

<sup>1</sup> *Times-Democrat*, March 18, 1883, “St. Malo.”



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haunting apprehensiveness. The background was so carefully drawn that one had a feeling of disappointment when it ended without describing some duel between semi-savage fishermen or, at least, a murder by the side of the spectral bayou.

It was to a short tale, the equal of this in ghostly quality, that he owed his acquaintance with a young person—Miss Bisland—who was later to become his first biographer. The story called "A Dead Love" had been published in 1882 and was a very poetical treatment of the survival, beyond the tomb, of a passionate love. It attracted the attention of Miss Bisland, who had come down to New Orleans from Natchez, Miss., a tall, handsome, dark-eyed girl of 18, driven by a consuming desire to retrieve the family fortunes by journalism. She had been so impressed with the eerie beauty of the tale that she contrived to meet Hearn and tell him of her admiration. This was the beginning of another one of those friendships that ran the strange fickle course usual to his intimacies.

As Miss Bisland was both original and determined it did not take her long to secure a position on the *Times-Democrat*. At first Hearn seemed to take only a passing interest in her, but when she became ill and almost died in the small hotel where she was staying, his pity was roused for a while; however, it soon flickered out. Even in 1884 when they were both at Grand Isle he was not in any way attentive, as all his interest was centred in a woman of the island to the exclusion of every one else. During the course of the next year the excellence of her work on the *Times-Democrat* made quite an impression on him, even though his opinion of her other qualities was strangely at variance. Some of her charac-

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teristics repelled while others attracted him. He summarized, so vividly and directly, these peculiar warring reactions to her personality in a letter to a friend that no shadow of a doubt is left as to his own belief in the justice of his criticism.

“The lady-writer you inquire about is probably Miss Bessie Bisland, who writes the ‘Bric-a-Brac’ for *T-D.*, reports Women’s meetings, etc., and occasionally writes some superb poetry (I am not joking) over the signature of B. L. R. Dane. She is really a genius poetically, needs only discipline and practice;—she has written sonnets, villanelles, rondeaux, etc., of extraordinary excellence. Tall, fair-skinned, large black eyes, and dark hair. Some call her beautiful; others, pretty; I don’t think her either one or the other; but she is decidedly attractive physically and intellectually. Otherwise she is selfish, unfeeling, hard, cunning, vindictive: a woman that will make inferno in any husband’s life, unless he have a character of tremendous force. You may see her some day; she thinks of settling in New York. A girl that reminds me of a hawk,—although her nose is not aquiline—a graceful creature of prey! That is all I can tell you about her. Next Sunday I’ll send you a critique I’m writing on her poems.”

And the following week he kept his promise and sent the “critique” which is interesting as it serves to complete the picture his future biographer had registered on his brain.

“B. L. R. DANE

“True poetic talent, which spreads its wings early, is so rare a gift that its discovery is something to

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be proud of. We may well be pardoned for extolling the merits of an attaché of the *Times-Democrat*, if we can make it appear that we have one possessing a poetical power at once uncommon and facile; and believing this, we deem it opportune to remove the literary mask which has successfully disguised one of our contributors. Be it known, therefore, that B. L. R. Dane (Miss Bisland) is a young lady attached to the staff of the *Times-Democrat*, who without any special poetical study,—we might say almost without effort,—has produced for these columns poetry so remarkable that many have been led to doubt its authenticity as an original contribution.

“Before becoming regularly connected with this paper,—before her identity was indeed known to us,—we received and published about two years ago a little rondeau by her, so exquisite and so original that considerable curiosity was aroused in regard to the personality of the author. It revealed a power of weird fancy worthy of any literary celebrity; and, as might be supposed, no one imagined for a moment the writer to be a woman. Here is the rondeau:

“ ‘DEAD! DEAD!’

“ ‘O fierce wild wind that in thy moaning pain  
Beats't with wet fingers on my door in vain!  
Dost thou come from the graves with that sad cry  
That pleads for entrance—that, denied, goes by,  
And faints to tears amidst the freezing rain?  
In here the glowing fire leaps amain  
And from its red heart casts a ruddy stain:  
Here is no thought of death or men that die—  
O fierce wild wind!

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“Why shouldst thou come, then, to my window-pane  
To wring thy hands and weep and sore complain  
That they alone, and wet, and cold must lie  
In dark, deep graves, and we breathe not a sigh?  
We had forgot—the quick and dead are twain,  
O fierce wild wind!”

“Subsequently, encouraged, the young lady sent to this paper several equally singular and beautiful little poems,—turning her talent successfully to the imitation of antique French forms of verse (villanelles, ballades, etc.,) and occasionally adopting measures apparently original with her, but always graceful. Some of these contributions,—which we afterward discovered to have been written without revision or remodelling of any sort,—were more perfect than others; but in every instance where the theme evoked a sense of weirdness or violent pathos, the effort was admirable. Our readers may recollect a rather long poem entitled ‘Fever Dreams,’ which appeared in the spring of 1884, and contained some very fine examples of this ability,—picturing the strange fancies of one who steals from a sick couch unobserved, to faint upon the grave of a dead sweetheart:

“A thousand times the great clock’s heart has  
beat,—  
A thousand, thousand times!  
And ever at the hours the sudden, sweet,  
Low, unexpected ringing of the chimes  
Tells how the night doth slowly pass away.  
The hissing snow fell thro’ the air all day,  
But with the dark did cease;  
I hear the shivers of the frozen trees.

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The night lamp's flame, tho' weak the flame and  
small,  
Cast shadows giant tall  
That to the ceiling crawl;  
The cap-frill of the sleeping nurse doth fall  
And nod this way and that against the wall.  
Quiet the great dark house, and deeply sleep they  
all!

"They held me fast; they could not hear the call  
That I heard ever. Chill the winds did blow,  
The skies were dark, the ways were white with  
snow—

He did not call, I wandered to think so!  
But now they sleep I will rise and go.

. . . I step out on the floor—  
How loud the nurse doth snore!—  
But I softly close the door.

. . .  
My long black shadow runs by my side—  
Was it I or my love that died  
And was buried so deeply under the snow  
So many hundred years ago?"

. . .  
"Her fancies are not always confined to fantastic  
or to pathetic subjects, however;—she has produced  
some pretty *vers-de-societe*;—a sonnet or two of  
serious beauty, such as *Une tigresse*,—printed a few  
months ago,—with a fine suggestion of metempe-  
sychosis;—and sundry poems in quatrains, such  
as *Mardi Gras*, in which the night scene from a  
balcony is strongly pictured, together with the  
singular impression often created by the aspect of  
a great crowd:—



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“ ‘ . . . A wide, dark, restless sea of heads, the crowd;  
It never was so great, I think, before;  
And how they heave and sway, and murmur hoarse,  
Like a full tide upon a wind-swept shore.

“ ‘We look down on them with a touch of scorn,  
But they might fill our inmost souls with awe,  
If all that brute, tremendous force should rise  
And burst the useless barriers of law  
As they did once in France. . . .’

“But the poem which especially suggested this brief attempt to call well-merited attention to her talent, and which most evidences the maturing of that talent into something really superb, was the piece entitled ‘*Caged*,’ which we printed a few Sundays ago, and which we now reproduce in full. After a careful perusal of it, we believe that our verdict in regard to its author will be fully indorsed by the most competent judges. Any young lady who can write such verses as these has no common literary force:—

### “ ‘CAGED

“ ‘The slanting sunbeams creep between the bars  
All blackly lying sharp athwart the gold  
That fades before the coming of the stars,  
And low, dim moon ashine across the wold.  
The lispings, ebbing waters slip from land  
To surge and thunder in the flowing tide,  
And lash again the grey and patient sand;  
“*Alas!*” she saith,—“*how sweet the world outside.*”

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“The moon and stars wheel down the vault of  
heaven,

And sink into the deep abysmal sea  
That rings the world; and when the dark is riven,  
The great, fair winds come up across the lea  
With wild wet feet. She hears the thunderous  
wings

Of sea birds clanging out on pinions wide—  
Beneath her eaves a swallow sits and sings—

*“Alas!” she saith,—“how sweet the world out-  
side.”*

“In the white dawn she beats against her cage  
With wrathful lips and passion-broken cries;  
Or sullen, sits in silent hopeless rage,

Staring against the sun with sombre eyes  
That know no more a hope or pallid fear;  
A deep despair doth make them dark and wide,  
And baffled as the eyes of death-struck seer.

*“Alas!” she saith,—“how sweet the world out-  
side.”*

“Oh, most high gods! Why mock a patient soul?  
And in her eyes, her weak tears to deride,  
Blow smoke from all your incense altars curled?

*“Alas!” she saith,—“how sweet the world out-  
side.” ’ ’ ’*

In view of the very candid enumeration of what he considered her good and bad points, his feelings toward her were to crystallize eventually into an unexpected form after they had met once more in New York, where she had preceded him by one or two years in order to become the assistant-editor of the *Cosmopolitan*.

Of course Hearn's future move to that city de-

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pended not so much upon his success on the *Times-Democrat* as upon his ability to obtain a larger audience—to secure publication of his books and articles in the North. As usual, his wanderlust kept him eager for change, so he spent all his efforts in this direction. He was still interested in Creole lore and his note-books were filled with quaint negro proverbs in Gombo French. These he arranged and translated first into correct French and then into English, giving all three versions and submitted the result to *Harper's* under the title of “Gombo Zhèbes.” They were refused and in his disappointment he wrote to his friend Will H. Coleman, in New York, asking if he would publish them.

When Coleman was in the machinery business in New Orleans he and Hearn had been fast friends, probably drawn to each other by the fact that both were inordinately fond of good food. The many delicious dinners they had eaten together, however, seemed to have affected them in entirely opposite ways, for Hearn remained painfully lean, while Coleman developed a Falstaffian paunch. About 1880 Coleman's business failing, he went to New York and, possibly inspired by Hearn's frequent talks on the subject, opened a second-hand book shop under the old Astor Hotel. Upon the receipt of Hearn's letter he had replied his book would attract so small a public that it would be a losing proposition. Hearn was undaunted at this refusal, for he knew his man and the proper bait with which to catch him. He had kept just as careful a record of every good recipe he had encountered in New Orleans as he had of Gombo Proverbs and, by that time, had a great number, most of which were obtained from the wife of his friend, Dr. Matas. All these he had filed

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away and they were well worth preserving as, in the Creole cuisine, is found the suave art of the French given unexpected turns and gastronomic surprises by the piquant seasoning of Spain. Hearn, it is to be suspected, had always been a prey to one of these suppressed ambitions so common to boys, which generally takes the form of a desire to be a policeman or the leader of a band. In his case it followed a different channel—he wanted to edit a cook-book—a wish he had already boldly avowed in the columns of the *Item*. Now he saw the possibility of satisfying this desire and, at the same time, getting “Gombo Zhèbes” published, so he suggested that if Coleman would bring out the “Proverbs” he, Hearn, would throw in the MS. for another book which would be sure to sell—a wonderful collection of the best Creole recipes. Coleman could not say that only a few people would be interested in *that* book, for man’s heart is too close to his stomach—some even say it has slipped down.

Coleman capitulated and agreed to publish both books “Gombo Zhèbes” and “La Cuisine Creole,” the latter anonymously, as Hearn, although he even wrote the introduction, did not want to be known as the compiler of a cook-book. A third book—“The Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans”—probably was included in this understanding. At least we are certain that Hearn was one of its editors, contributed two articles<sup>1</sup> and possibly suggested the whole idea. In any event, it still remains the very best guide book ever printed of New Orleans. The plan was to get all three

<sup>1</sup> The “Sketch Book” contains a reprint from the *Century* of Hearn’s article “The Scenes of Cable’s Romances,” and a description of Pere Antoine’s Palm (page 114) which first appeared in the *Item*, illustrated by a wood cut of the palm, made from a pencil sketch by Hearn.

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books on the market by the time the Cotton Exposition opened (in 1884) on the theory that they would have a brisk sale among the hordes of tourists who were expected. But delays in the printing occurred and they did not appear until April, 1885. By that time the crowds had left and the books sold badly. "La Cuisine Creole," however, did much better than either of the others—a success which vindicated Coleman's judgment in nibbling at Hearn's bait. Hundreds of copies of "Gombo Zhèbes" and the "Sketch Book" lay mouldering, for years, in a forgotten closet of a New Orleans book dealer, which explains why most of them bought there, are foxed and in bad condition.

While none of Hearn's books had shown even moderate financial returns, the mere fact of their publication was, at least, encouraging, and the standing which this gave him caused some of the Northern magazines to accept his contributions. Cable, as we know, had given him his first start when he got the *Century* to publish the article, "The Scenes of Cable's Romances." Now Cable was to do him an even greater service, to which no taint of possible personal publicity could attach—he was to lay the foundation for Hearn's connection with Harper Bros., the publishers. This house had become apprehensive of the great success its younger rival, *Scribner's Magazine*, had been making, and determined that a drastic campaign was necessary. Cable was then the shining light among the contributors to *Scribner's* so *Harper's* decided to try to win him away and secure his services for themselves. With this end in view they sent J. O. Davidson, a marine painter, to New Orleans to talk the matter over with Cable. In spite of all sorts of flattering offers, Cable's sense of loyalty would not



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permit him to make any change. He had made his reputation with *Scribner's* and the *Century* and he was going to stick by them. Davidson was terribly disappointed and complained that he had had the long journey for nothing. Cable replied that he would try to arrange it so that Davidson need not go back empty-handed. It happened to be the evening upon which Hearn was in the habit of calling on Cable, so, when he arrived, Cable sat down on the sofa on one side of him with Davidson on the other, and they talked and argued until they finally made him promise to do a series of articles. The first of these eventually appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, December 6, 1884, under the title of "Quaint New Orleans and Its Inhabitants." Twelve more articles followed, most of them coming out in *Harper's Weekly*, the rest in the *Bazaar*. They were descriptions of some of the exhibits of the Centennial Exposition or accounts of New Orleans, its Voodoo, its superstitions or its Creole French and, in one respect, were all alike. In spite of the fact that they were written in polished, harmonious English and that a few—such as the description of the Japanese exhibit—were exquisitely and delicately done and vibrated with the iridescent chromatic changes that only Hearn could produce, still analysis showed them to be merely catalogues of unusual scraps of information which happened to interest him, enumerations of "choses vues"—the pickings of an orderly magpie who carefully assorted his treasure trove under headings. They had no changes in pace, no working up to a climax—each detail was beautifully wrought, but they were all of equal value. There was no attempt to choose salients and make them stand out against a background of minor

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items; they were merely the painstaking observations of a myope.

In spite of the great service Cable had been to him, Hearn's innate perversity asserted itself and his dislike for Cable, which had only been restrained by his desire to profit by his influence, broke bonds. The canker of envy at the other man's growing success (which was the real source of his spleen) he hid, even from himself, by nursing a multitude of fancied injuries. Chief among them was that Cable had asked him to translate some Creole songs for him anonymously. This rankled and rankled until his animosity engendered suspicion. One evening he and Baker, after having accepted an invitation to supper, arrived at Cable's front door. Just as Baker was about to ring the bell, Hearn, who had been moody and silent on the way over, said, "No! I won't go. That man will steal my ideas!" and disappeared around the corner, running, leaving Baker to make any explanation he saw fit.

These suspicions were not all on one side either, for Cable felt that Hearn had stolen a story of Last Island which he had once told him and embodied it in "Chita." But this condition of affairs would have been difficult to avoid under the circumstances. They were living in a relatively small town, seeing each other two or three times a week. Both were prolific writers and both were drawing on the same limited source of Creole lore for their material. In spite of all this ill will, when Cable left for a visit to New York he took with him a very cordial letter of introduction to Krehbiel from Hearn.

"My dear Krehbiel:—I have requested Mr. Cable to call on you; or to invite you to call upon

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him, during his stay in New York. He is a great lover of your art; and I am sure it will be a delight to you to introduce him to some of the musical luxuries of the metropolis, or to show him something of your own treasury of musical curiosities. If you would like to chat about Creole music, you will have a fine chance to do so. Let me hear from you when time and inclination permit,

“Your fellow-romantic,

“LAFCADIO HEARN.”

Soon a new element entered into and fanned the flames of Hearn's hatred. Rumours came floating back to New Orleans that Krehbiel was collaborating with Cable, but in a subordinate way. Hearn became furiously jealous of their intimacy and filled his letters to Krehbiel with frightful warnings against Cable and abuse so exaggerated as to be fantastic. Nevertheless, in spite of his venom, Hearn could not suppress a certain admiration for Cable which he showed in a letter to Krehbiel, saying: “He has extraordinary will power; and on one occasion, having paralyzed his right hand by overwork, he immediately trained himself to write with his left hand.” . . . “Although,—I could not under any circumstances, feel a personal sympathy with so *eccentrically conservative* a man, I would really feel sorry to hear of his utterly breaking down.”

When Cable came back Hearn called on him, but the breach had gone too far and friendly relations were never renewed and hate boiled secretly in Hearn's heart. Thus his friendship with the man who had given him his first start with the Northern magazines was stifled by a miasma of morbid suspicion and dislike.

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In spite of all the extra work entailed by his arrangements with *Harper's* he, in no way, neglected his regular stint on the *Times-Democrat*; in fact, if anything, the quality of his output improved, which speaks well for his industry when the slowness with which he produced is remembered.

He himself has given the best picture of the painful deliberation with which he wrote when he said in a letter to Alden:

"The more I work, the more the conviction grows upon me that no study of life can be written in less than the actual time required *to live* the scenes described."

Having turned from the various strange literatures represented in "Stray Leaves," he now began an intensive study of a group of Chinese legends. He published each one in the *Times-Democrat* as soon as they were sufficiently polished to satisfy his exacting taste, and they met with such a marked success that he ventured to submit one to *Harper's*. Its publication in the *Bazaar* encouraged him to collect them in book form under the title "Some Chinese Ghosts."

After numberless disappointments he got Roberts Bros. of Boston to publish them in 1887. When the book had been out a short time they sent him a statement of royalties. It was small to be sure, but that can not excuse his behaviour. The receipt of the statement threw him into one of those unreasoning explosions of anger that was sure to burst, sooner or later, upon the head of any one with whom he had business dealings. Grabbing a pen he wrote a characteristic note to his

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publishers, baldly accusing them of robbing him. The senior partner, Mr. Roberts, was a stiff-backed dignified descendant of the Pilgrim fathers, and he read it without visible signs of emotion other than a heightened grimness in the lines around his mouth. Pressing a button on his desk, he instructed the office boy to find out how many copies of "Some Chinese Ghosts" there were in the house. These facts having been reported to him, he merely said, "Destroy every copy and the plates with them." Thus ended the incident as far as Roberts & Co. were concerned, and it explains why the first editions of "Some Chinese Ghosts" are the hardest to find of any of Hearn's books. However, the few hundred copies which escaped the slaughter, increased his reputation even if they did not fatten his purse.

The Art editor of *Harper's*, Mr. Wm. Patten, sent one copy to Prof. Basil Hall Chamberlain, Dean of the Imperial University of Japan, who wrote, in reply:

"It is perfectly finished in its way—like some very rich sweetmeat of which it is delicious to taste a little now and then."

Had he been pressed a little further one feels certain that Prof. Chamberlain would have said, "a trifle cloying."

But the weakness of Hearn's style, at this period of his life, was not so much a question of over-dulcification as it was one of scale. He put into his work the beauty that a bijoutier puts into his jewelry—a finished, polished, intricate, but minute beauty; but the charm of jewelry is a luxury, while the splendour of great, living



## On the *Times-Democrat*

ideas, vivified by genius, will always be a necessity. In this fact is found the reason why the consensus of opinion classes Hearn as one of the greatest of the secondary literary luminaries, but never among the immortals.





## ≡ 68 CASQUET ≡

### IX: Mrs. Courtney Mothers Hearn

HEARN had been living in the *Vieux Carré* ever since his arrival in New Orleans, wandering from one strange rooming house to another, eating in peculiar dives, falling sick of the fever and, at times, feeling certain that he was about to lose what remained of his vision. He had become supersaturated with the life of this quarter—its sights, sounds, psychology and traditions—its lack of comfort, its dank feeling of decadence and even its smells. He had exhausted the quarter's local colour and there followed a revulsion of feeling,—a positive dislike for that part of New Orleans which had once so aroused his enthusiasm. He wrote to a friend:

“I am afraid another summer here would kill me.  
I dare not eat meat often, nor fruit,—in fact there

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are very few things a stranger can eat here with safety in July or August. As for the Creoles they eat grease and drink olive oil in sickening quantities, but it doesn't seem to hurt them."

"I am growing very weary of the Creole quarter and I think I shall pull up stakes and fly to the garden district where the orange trees are, but where Latin tongues are not spoken.

"I'm sick of Creole romance—it nearly cost me my life."

So he finally summoned sufficient resolution to forsake these "antiquated streets for the commonplace and practical American districts," and some time in 1881 he left the *Vieux Carré* which had been to him like an old mistress, beloved for the joys she had given, hated for the satiety. He took lodgings at 39 Constance Street, in the American quarter to be sure, but still in a Creole family. The room he occupied was in the rear portion of "a dilapidated French house, in a dilapidated part of the city" and he was so uncertain of the character of his landlord that he instructed his friends to forward his letters in care of Major Wm. M. Robinson as he did not know whether his mail would reach him if sent directly to his address.

This new abode was farther away from the non-descript eating-joints where he had been accustomed to get his generous meals, and where the greasiness of the cooking had begun to revolt him. Consequently when he heard from Thomas Colvert, a drygoods clerk whom he had met, that at Mrs. Courtney's boarding-house real home cooking could be gotten at reasonable prices, he was tempted to give it a trial.

Mrs. Courtney was an Irishwoman with the ready

sympathy and motherliness of the best of the women of that race. She had married a kindly but inefficient husband and they had one daughter Ella, at this time about twelve years old. Everything that Courtney started petered out so Mrs. Courtney had been forced to don the metaphorical pants, emblems of masculine supremacy, and assume the burdens of the whole family. Some years previously they had moved into an old rambling corner house at 68 Gasquet, whose two sides fronting on the street were shaded by a wooden gallery which entirely covered the sidewalk and gave the rooms on the first floor a pleasant coolness during the terrible summer days.

It was in the midst of a wanton district, surrounded by one- and two-storied cottages which sheltered the more prosperous "horizontales" of the city, who still retained sufficient youth and beauty not to be forced to live among the drabs of the restricted district. They slept late and only in the cool of the evening were they visible, carefully dressed in the height of fashion, sitting on their doorsteps, gossiping as they waited for their evening visitors, while their negro serving wenches plied back and forth with pitchers to be filled with beer or good claret.

Here into this cloying miasma of forbidden pleasures moved this energetic motherly Irishwoman, straight as a string—her common sense and kindness like a cool clean breeze from the ocean, and here she opened a corner-grocery. The students from a college of medicine only three blocks away began to go to her store for a quick cold lunch. She felt that they should have a warm meal and permitted the favoured few to share the food she cooked for her family. This became so popular

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that she was forced to open the regular boarding-house to which Colvert took Hearn. Mrs. Courtney had learned the art of Creole cooking, but had restrained its richness and high seasoning with Irish simplicity. Hearn loved good food and had had pathetically little of it during a wandering life. So the thorough enjoyment with which he ate his first meal was only mitigated by his shyness. But this did not prevent him from making arrangements to take all his food there, and he even moved from Constance Street to a rooming house kept by Mrs. Canterbury at 278 Canal Street in order to be closer. However, the noises of clattering hoofs and wagon wheels bumping over the uneven cobbles, the continual passing of the rickety mule-drawn street cars frayed his nerves and kept him from writing, so Mrs. Courtney found him quieter quarters, equally close, in the two-story red-brick building<sup>1</sup> on the downtown river corner of Robertson and Gasquet. Here he moved his few simple belongings, his big wooden box of books and the bulgy bag which held his meagre wardrobe. He occupied the two corner rooms on the second floor, opening out on a gallery framed in iron lacework, and the rent he paid his landlady, Kate Higgins, was twenty dollars the month. But as his meals only cost him an additional dollar a day at Mrs. Courtney's and he was then getting a salary of thirty dollars a week from the *Times-Democrat*, he could well afford these extra indulgences and still have a respectable balance for his book-buying.

His life fell into an easy routine. In fact he had not enjoyed so many of the creature comforts since he had lived in Mrs. Brenane's house in Dublin. On his way

<sup>1</sup> Now 1565 Cleveland Street. Gasquet has been changed to Cleveland.



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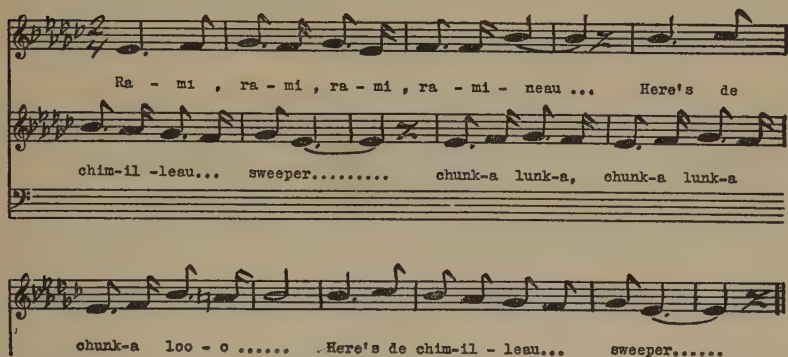
to the office he stopped at Mrs. Courtney's for breakfast and went back for lunch, while in the afternoons he wandered through the *Vieux Carré* searching for books or returned to his rooms to work. They were almost as sparsely furnished as a monk's cell—the larger one with only two chairs, a trunk and a narrow bed, whose tall head-posts served to support a mosquito bar. The smaller room had even less—only two large wooden chests filled with books, which looked like giant ditty-boxes. The bare walls were enlivened by but one picture—a lovely lady reclining luxuriously among cushions—which an artist friend from the North had given him. Everything was as spotlessly clean as it was ascetic. Louise Roche, the old negress who took care of his room, saw to that. Here he shivered and worked in winter or in summer wrote the whole sweltering afternoons through. Instead of a desk he used to balance his bag on the trunk which his new affluence had made possible, in order not to bend over so far to come within seeing distance. Then, cocking his head on one side, he see-sawed it back and forth as his half useless eye followed the lines of tiny purple script flowing from his pen onto the long narrow sheets of yellow paper which his nose and cheek almost brushed. It was yellow to soften the glare and long and narrow so that it would fold in the middle and fit easily in his side pocket.

He literally earned his living by the "sweat of his brow," as beads of perspiration ran down his nose and fell on his MS. But his concentration was proof against everything except the rich notes of some street vendor's call. Whenever he heard a mellow voice chanting, "Ice-cream *à la Vanille!*" or the top-hatted chimney-sweep singing his bilingual call which ended in a terrible

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cacophony, he always raised his head and listened, trying to catch both the air and the words to send to Krehbiel; and a smile never failed to cross his face when the old man wandered by, continually droning, "Panes put in, Ladies!"—a call that only a comma saved from a terrible ambiguity.

### CHIMNEY SWEEP'S CALL.



### R-R-RAMINEAU!!!

But he liked even better the softer voices of negresses which floated into his windows calling, "Bel calas! Bel calas! tou' chauds!"

But once the chanted notes had faded into the distance he bent his head again to his slow laborious effort—the refining of the gold of his already pure phrases.

The sun set, and only the lacking light put a finish to his labours, for to husband his sight he never worked after dark. Straightening his painfully bent back, he looked, discouraged, from the meagre pile of ink-traced sheets on his bag to the enormous heap of torn and rumpled leaves in the waste paper basket, and, picking up the big hat that gave him the appearance of a human mushroom, he started out to walk the block separating

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him from Mrs. Courtney's. This journey always held a thrill for him no matter how often his feet trod the same path. The sound of a soft voice speaking Gombo, the gleam of a dark eye peering from a square hole cut in the solid shutters, the flash of a graceful hand in the shadow of a half-open door or the shapely figure of some "frail" sitting on her door-step always spelled possible romance to him, and he sometimes arrived at Mrs. Courtney's with quivering nostrils.

Her motherly heart had been touched by her queer, half-blind little boarder, and, generous soul, she was flattered by his enormous appetite, instead of begrudging him his food as does the landlady of convention. Although she was thoroughly awed by his local reputation as a "great writer," his utter ineffectualness in all other matters had only served to rouse her instinct of protection and, of course, there was also the bond of a common Irish ancestry. It was not long before she was mothering him, saving tid-bits for his meals, bathing his eye with white of egg and darning shirts and socks. Practically an orphan at seven, his early life in Jesuit institutions and his later struggles in New York and Cincinnati had been destitute of feminine solicitude. Women, for him, had been divided into two classes—gentlewomen, to whom he felt he was repulsive on account of his eyes—a belief that made their society painful; and other women, far beneath him in brains and breeding, women of a night. It was wonderful now to be taken care of by an honest woman who did not regard him as evil-favoured. Their friendship ripened into a strong fine relation. She began to pamper his idiosyncrasies more and more, even to the point of arranging a little cubby-hole in which he could have his

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meals alone, as he had a terrible aversion to being seen while eating. In fact he was so sensitive that when he was asked out to dine, he was in the habit of saying to Mrs. Courtney, "I'm going out to supper to-night, you understand?" At such times she, good woman, prepared his usual meal an hour ahead so he might eat before he left and be spared the mortification of seeming, while cutting his food, to explore his plate with his nose—a performance his myopia made necessary.

This "private dining room" was in a small slant-roofed annex built across the back of the lot, such as is so often found in New Orleans. It was entirely separated from the main structure by an open yard and contained four rooms, the two on the second story originally intended for slave servants, and of the two below—one was a kitchen, the other a pantry or storeroom. It was this storeroom that Mrs. Courtney fitted up for Hearn with a small deal table and three cane-bottomed chairs. Its unevenly plastered walls were whitewashed and adorned only with a pattern of fly specks and some few illustrations cut from French periodicals. It was here that she served him herself, kept his glass full of good red wine and cut up his meat, being careful to remove all fat as he never could bear the taste of it. When Mrs. Courtney was too busy to sit with him during his meals, her husband took her place, but no one else save little Ella was ever allowed in the dining room—except by special invitation.

Modern methods of screening were unknown then, so it is easy to imagine the swarms of flies that filled a room next to a kitchen, in a climate so hot that it was necessary to leave doors and windows open. But no matter how they buzzed or pestered or clung to his hands and



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face Hearn was never seen to do more than brush them off gently. The ants that swarmed up the table leg he treated with equal consideration, interfering only with the most venturesome who had actually climbed into the sugar bowl. These he carefully lifted out and released on the floor. The infliction of pain to secure one's personal pleasure or comfort was wrong, he thought, and even ants and flies were entitled to their small chance of life and enjoyment. He, for his part, would do nothing to deprive them of it and in this attitude reflected the teachings of some of the Oriental religions which he was even then constantly studying.

Animals also interested him, although his preference was often exhibited for the kinds many people dislike. He made a particular pet of a small mouse that lived in a hole in the corner of his dining room. It became so tame that it showed no fear and even got to know the hours for meals better than Hearn did. At the proper time it always came out and sat up near the table waiting for the dole he never forgot to give.

There was an old turtle, too, living under the doorstep which he had trained, with infinite patience and fair treatment, to come when he called. He never saw it making its hesitating way around the yard, very much as if it too was terribly nearsighted, that he did not think of many strange tales about turtles, their place in early religions and their reputation for wisdom. Many an evening he sat on his doorstep, smoking his interminable pipe, and telling these things to little Ella, who sat open-mouthed at his feet, while Mrs. Courtney, hands on hip, snatched a breath of fresh air in the kitchen door and looked on in admiration. "Listen, Ella, to the tale Abu Mohammed el Hassan, son of Amr, told when he came



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home from his voyages," he would commence, and then his low voice would flow on:

" . . . A vessel returning from India, met with an accident on the way; and the captain found himself obliged to make for a certain little island, without any water and without any wood upon it. There the sailors discharged all the cargo, and the vessel remained there until the damages she had received were repaired. Then all the bales of merchandise were taken aboard again, and stored away; and everything was prepared for the voyage. Just about this time came the feast of NEUROUZ (New Year's); and the passengers determined to celebrate it on shore. For this purpose they brought to the beach all the old rags, palm leaves, and kindling they could find on board the ship; and with these they made a bonfire on the island. Suddenly the island trembled and quaked beneath their feet. Not being far from the water all were able to reach it, jump in and cling to the boats. At the same moment, the island sank into the waves, producing so mighty an eddy in the ocean, that they narrowly escaped being carried down with it, and were only able to save their lives with the greatest difficulty. . . . Now that island was only a turtle sleeping at the surface of the sea; awakened by the scorching heat of the fire, it had dived down to save itself. . . .

"These are very big fibs of course, but you must remember that old Arab captains had really seen very wonderful things and only exaggerated what they actually saw and heard."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hearn wrote for Ella Courtney a forty-three page MS., which he called an old Arabian book of travels. This he illustrated with six curious pencil sketches of fabulous animals described by returning Arabian sea captains. The story quoted is part of this MS. now in the author's collection.

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But when Hearn so far forgot his audience as to descant at length upon the tenets of the Buddhist religion and other Oriental faiths, his success as a conversationalist was very meagre. At such times even Mrs. Courtney's great respect for him was not sufficient to keep her quiet, and her faith burst forth in pious remonstrance: "Ah! and I pray God every night on my knees to make you a good Catholic, and you an Irishman, too!" And Hearn, whose Pantheism was very real, always replied gently: "I'm glad you pray your God for me. Don't stop."

Other days there were when he sat on the doorstep after his meal, bent over with his head in his hands, as he silently watched for hours, the long, endless lines of burden-bearing ants that steadily streamed across the yard and disappeared under the house, at his feet, until Mrs. Courtney, glancing out of her kitchen window, would say: "And sure, is there anythin' botherin' you, Mr. Hearn?" To which he replied, "Why, no, Mrs. Courtney, I'm only watching those ants. They seem so superior to us. They never fight among themselves, or backbite, or loaf. They're always working, working for the common good of their community. At a second's notice they are willing to sacrifice their lives—everything—to the general welfare. People are not like this. The propriety and morality of the ant is far higher than that of the human. If people could only learn to cooperate and all work for the public weal, to forget themselves and their egotism—how much better the world would be." And his gentle voice trailed on in the gradually growing plushy darkness until only the intermittent glow of his pipe marked the place where the

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voice came from, and matter-of-fact Mrs. Courtney suddenly seemed to awake from a condition of partial hypnosis and hurried into the house with a "My! My! and I've forgotten to light my lamps." But the intimacy of these evening talks was, to a certain extent, interfered with. Hearn had grown in reputation and importance, and Mrs. Courtney decided that it was no longer fitting for such a literary light to dine in a little room next to the kitchen, so she arranged another place for him next to the grocery in the front of the house with one window opening on Gasquet Street. It was here that he henceforth took his meals and received his friends, and it was from this window that he used to see Page Baker ride up on his handsome gaited saddle horse, and little Ella Courtney and her cousin, Margaret Corcoran, race out to see which would have the honour of holding the bridle while Baker went in to talk with Hearn. He became very much attached to little Ella, who was a sweet-faced, pleasant-tempered child and he made her the envy of the whole juvenile neighbourhood by the presents he gave her. One in particular is still famous in local tradition. It was a book—a wonderful book—that cost five dollars. It had pictures of animals and when you pulled a tab they moved in marvellous ways. There were even fish that swam under a cover of isinglass—simulacra of the sea. Hours he spent sitting on the doorstep of his little room, teaching Ella French with, I'm afraid, modest success. What she liked much better were stories, wonderful tales of Greek heroes and Gypsy adventure that used to turn her into a small statue of attention for as long as they lasted. As she grew older she got an album and, of course, her adored Mr. Hearn wrote in it. Here

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is what he penned upon two pages of that quaint little book with a rosebud modelled in coloured silk on its cover:

“Dear Ella:—I will not try to write any of my own thoughts in your book; they would be worth very little. I shall write for you a translation from Victor Hugo which I have made. The original poem entitled ‘A Elle’ (To Her) was not found until after his death:—and was never translated before:

### “To HER

#### I

“Thy trembling arm I pressed  
Fondly: our thoughts confessed  
Loves conquest tender.

“God filled the vast sweet Night;  
Love filled our hearts;—the Light  
Of stars made splendour.

#### II

“Even as we walked and dreamed,  
Between earth and heaven it seemed  
Our souls were speaking.

“The Stars looked down on thy face;  
Thine eyes through violet space,  
The Stars were seeking.

#### III

“And from the astral height  
Feeling the soft sweet light  
Thrill to thy soul,

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“Thou saidst: ‘O God of bliss!—  
Lord God of the Blue Abyss,  
Thou madest the Whole!’

### IV

“And the Stars were whispering low  
To the God of Space:—‘We know,  
Lord God of Eternity,

“‘Dear God, all love is thine!—  
Even by Love’s light we shine,  
Thou madest Beauty!’

“Lafcadio Hearn <sup>1</sup>  
May 19th, 1887.”

One afternoon as Hearn picked his near-sighted way through the outwardly decorous, but secretly ribald, streets that led to his lodging, he had an adventure—one that twisted his queer sensitive soul. He saw a man come out of a yard with a pail of water, place it near the curb and then proceed to douse some defenceless little kittens into it. Hearn stared paralyzed with horror and an irresistible desire to shoot or stab the brutal murderer swept over him. Cruelty to animals, in his estimation, was worse than murder—for murder might be justifiable—the other never. He started for the man who was just disappearing through his gate when the frantic mother cat shot over the fence to the pail, like an arrow, and began desperately fishing for the bodies of her offspring. Hearn, almost sobbing, knelt on the sidewalk to help her and found a spark of

<sup>1</sup> This poem later reappeared in the *Times-Democrat* of May 22, 1887, for Hearn never lost anything from his voluminous notebooks.



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life in one little body. Tucking the soppy speck under his coat, he ran to Mrs. Courtney. The sympathetic Irishwoman dried the mite over the fire, fed it warm milk, and then Hearn wrapped it up in soft rags and put it to sleep in the corner of his dining room. The kitten, a grey tabby, was christened "Nanny" and grew amazingly in wisdom and devotion.

She soon learned to wait for him at the door of his little dining room, and after he had rubbed the back which she arched to his hand, she jumped into her particular chair and sat there while he ate, accepting with well-bred daintiness the tid-bits he offered her. Indeed she became so pampered that on Fridays Mrs. Courtney always cooked a special piece of fish for her.

Of course no honest aspersions can be cast upon the reality of his affection for Nanny; but he had read in his French periodicals of de Maupassant's cat, Piroli, of the musical M. Souris, Pierre Loti's cat, which had a taste for Mozart's sonatas, and he had even translated for the *Item* an account by Zola of his two cats, Frances and Catherine, and so the idea that he too was following the best tradition of his literary masters, in the matter of felines, pandered a little to his vanity and put a keen edge on his appreciation of Nanny's purring companionship.

His interest in cats became so deep that reflections of it often appeared in the *Times-Democrat*, and there is no doubt but that Nanny indirectly inspired:

### "STUDIES IN CATS

"While a majority of our scientific men have devoted themselves exclusively to research in the

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field of electricity and steam, a few patient, noble-minded philanthropists have been silently exploring the domain of science as applicable to cats. No hungry graspers after sordid gain are they, but modest burners of the midnight oil, content to know, as the sufficient reward of all their toil, that they have conferred some benefit upon the human race. Brush, Edison, Field, Morse and such, may have behind them vast accumulations of wealth, and the noisy fame of material success, but the nameless heroes whom we celebrate will be followed to their long homes by the prayers and grateful benisons of the world.

“The efforts to which we allude first crystallized, some few years ago, in the foundation, by a scientific Belgian gentleman, of an institute for the education of cats on the carrier-pigeon plan. His followers and disciples began by making home pleasant for their cats. Those luxurious beasts were surrounded by, literally smothered in attentions. Their days were brightened by solicitude, their nights were made soft and warm beyond all precedent. After having thus endeared their homes to them, the next move was to send the cats to the scientific person’s institute, where they would be taught to miss and sigh for the comforts they had left behind. No more clotted cream, no more downy couches, no warm corners by the hearth—nothing but studied ill treatment and gaunt penury at every turn. And then, when the contrast has been emphasized sufficiently to convince the most improvident and unobservant cat, the animal would be turned loose with a letter tied round his neck and left to streak it for home. It will be seen that this plan was truly

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ingenious, since the members of the society were not only not compelled to spend money on other people's cats held for carrier purposes, but were, in fact, bound to treat them in the very shabbiest manner possible. Yet even this ingenious and carefully considered plan fell through. The domestic cat proved a failure for postal services. He would, when first liberated, fly forth like some lurid boomerang into the turbid night, his eyes aflame, his tail distent, his bosom wild with homesickness and hunger; but, from one cause or another, he would tarry by the way. For as he sailed high up among the frightened stars, he'd hear from far below the Tabby's plaintive call come welling up from the woodshed's eaves, and then, as that burning note did smite him through and through, honour, home, responsibility, supper, all would be forgotten. His mistress, watching fondly for him by the slowly fading fire, would hear shrill sounds of revelry at vague distances, but not until late next day would she see her beloved Reginald, and then only see him weary, ragged, disreputable, with blood-shot eyes and much dishevelled coat, and the missive at his neck all marked with claws and bristling with strange hair.

"Baffled thus in the endeavour to moralize the cat and to devote him to useful and industrial ends, science has since considered means of circumventing and repelling him. A promising move in this direction was the revolving top-rail for back and division fences. This consisted simply of a small and slippery rail, working on well-greased axles and running along the top of all yard fences. As the visiting cat stepped gingerly on this rail, it did not move; but when, lulled into false security and lift-

## CAT-ANKAROUS.



Hear the yelling of the cats! Horrid cats!  
How vain are bottles, boots, brickbats'.  
In the silence of the night, how we shiver with  
affright,  
At the melancholy menace of their tones,  
And each note, from each infernal feline throat  
Goes right to the marrow of one's bones.  
Yet catakins may be used for a variety of stuffs,  
for robes and rugs and muffs,  
And for the rubbers of electrical machines,  
And we have repeatedly suggested the means  
Of preventing the night from being made hide-  
ous, and enjoying that sleep that knits up  
the raveled sleeve of care.

Scat!—scat!

They are only too well aware  
That they can safely yowl beyond the range of  
human wrath, and howl,  
Instead of attending to their legitimate business  
and trying to catch a rat.

Darn a cat!

One of Hearn's Illustrated Poems (?) from the *Item*.

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ing up his voice to call Maria-a-a-r! he forgot his care, the treacherous rail would turn and he would fall, stretched out and spitting, into the hospitable watch-dog's jaws. For a while this wonderful contrivance checked the gregarious tendencies of cats and thinned the ranks of the peripatetics to a highly satisfactory extent, but at last people forgot to oil the axles, or they lost their bulldogs, and gradually the tom-cat resumed his habits with undiminished if not aggravated vim.

"Only one hope remains, so far as we know at present. The silent army of workers may have surprises in store for us, but the electric wire is all that we actually have in sight. This wire is stretched along on fence-tops, on the eaves and combs of wood-sheds, and connected with powerfully charged Leyden jars or storage batteries concealed in the bed-room of the operator. As soon as the cats become thick and the chorus very dreadful, the current is turned on and the cats are paralyzed. The private watchman is then called in and the cats are destroyed with a club. There are some drawbacks to this contrivance, for on one night in New York, last month, 93 private watchmen and as many chambermaids were stricken down at their respective back gates, while discussing civil service reform. But it is pleasant and reassuring to feel that science is at work and that, some day, we shall be able to repel the visiting tom-cats without leaving our fireside—that our back fences shall cease to be the vehicles of dissipation, and that our wood sheds may cease to blush." <sup>1</sup>

For five long years Nanny faithfully companioned Hearn and gave him all the affection and understanding

<sup>1</sup> *Times-Democrat*, January 14, 1883.



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of which a cat was capable. But of course when he left New Orleans for good in 1887 he could not take her with him to share his unknown adventures in New York so she was left behind and, it is to be feared, was as easily forgotten as were, sooner or later, most of his other friends. A few years after his departure Mrs. Courtney met with reverses and was forced to move away from Gasquet Street. Then it was that Nanny came face to face with a cruel superstition. No Irish family would move to a new house with a cat—it brought bad luck. So she was left in Gasquet Street, but her hard fate was alleviated by Margaret Corcoran, a niece of Mrs. Courtney's, who made a daily pilgrimage with food to the old grocery until, one day, she arrived only to find Nanny stiff and cold.

But all Hearn's time during his stay in New Orleans was not passed in as wholesome an atmosphere as that of the Courtney household. There were also the Rabelaisian interludes of nights spent with Denny Corcoran. Hearn always listened to the lure of amorous adventure, for his passions had never been bridled. In fact, he had made a sort of cult of their satisfaction and he epitomized his creed when he said:

“The law of true art, even according to the Greek idea, is to seek beauty wherever it is to be found, and separate it from the dross of life as gold from ore. You do not see beauty in animal passion;—yet passion was the inspiring breath of Greek art and the mother of language; and its gratification is the act of a creator, and the divinest rite of Nature's temple.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn,” by Bisland, letter to Krehbiel, p. 218.

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That was his theory, but when it came to its practical application, the reality fell far short of the picture conjured in his incontinent imagination.

His short figure, blemished eyes, dowdy, ill-fitting clothes and poverty of purse were not the qualifications of a successful Lothario; while his desperate diffidence and certain tawny-tinted rumours of his manner of life with Althea Foley in Cincinnati only served as additional millstones to circumscribe the fields of his adventures to purely (or rather impurely) mercenary ones. But even in such half-circles, where terms of intimacy are so recklessly spontaneous, how could such a shy person make his first acquaintances? Denny Corcoran was the answer.

Mrs. Courtney often shook her head over Denny and said, "Although he's my own brother's child, Denny's a bad, bad boy and he'll surely come to no good end, you mark my words." But these forebodings slid off the "bad boy's" broad back like rain off the roof as he went on his unconcerned and devious way.

"Boy" was hardly an accurate description of Denny, because he weighed over three hundred pounds and was as dangerous to his enemies as a stick of dynamite, handled carelessly. He had large, coarse features and his head was set, with no neck between, on a pair of gigantic shoulders from each of which swung an arm like a gorilla's reaching almost to his knee. His enormous bulk was supported by very short and equally bowed legs and, when he moved, the whole heft of the man rolled from side to side like a grizzly bear when it walks erect. A pair of pistols, as long as your arm, nestled in each hip pocket under cover of the tails of a

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cutaway coat, and they were as much a part of his every-day dress as trousers.

When a boy, his absolutely reckless Irish courage had carried him to gang leadership and it had not taken him long to get into serious trouble. In an altercation with Dan Haukery they clinched and fell, and when Denny broke away and heaved himself to his feet, Dan lay writhing and cursing on the ground, disembowelled by a penknife. Haukery died and Denny escaped on the schooner *Indianola* to the West Indies, where he stayed until his longing for home forced him to take ship for New Orleans. Trouville Sykes recognized him as he tried to sneak off the vessel at Biloxi and caused his arrest, but the plea of self-defence was sufficient to save him at the trial. After his release the restricted district, where he was king, claimed him once more. Here he reigned and exacted tribute from his subjects, feared by every one. The negroes, passing him in the street, turned white if he so much as looked at them. But with it all, he had a certain rough honesty—there was nothing he would not do for a friend (even to putting their pet enemy out of the way). He was absolutely fearless and as quick on the draw as an adder is to strike. Proof of which was that he had killed, in all, five men. In every case he claimed self-defence and used to complain continually that people tried to impose on him and pick quarrels and, as he was too heavy to run away, he just had to stay and “kill ’em.”

On election day Denny came into his own. Whenever there was a close contest in any outlying district he repaired to the polling place and there hoisted his three hundred pounds of sinful flesh and muscle to the top

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of the ballot box to sit, imperturbably chewing tobacco like some sort of gross venial idol of Mammon, tricked out as a jest in tailor-made clothes. Although a good-natured Irish gleam often played in the corner of his eye, the two sinister bumps under his coat-tails were a constant reminder that it was unsafe to trust the gleam too far. Anyway this is what the members of the opposition party always thought when they came in to vote and found Denny sitting there. No one had the nerve to push him off so they went home without depositing their ballot. All was different, however, when any one came in whom Denny was sure could be depended upon to vote "right." For these he heaved his Magogian amplitude off the box and, with it, removed the obstruction to the free exercise of the franchise.

This was the companion Hearn chose for his nocturnal grimalkin-like perambulations. He had first seen Denny when he came to visit his aunt, Mrs. Courtney, at 68 Gasquet Street, and Denny's enormous size and strength had immediately attracted him. As is the peculiarity of most small men, Hearn had the wildest admiration for the gigantic and there is a pathetic editorial which he wrote for the *Item* in which he bewailed the fact that "the man who has big broad shoulders and big whiskers and a bold eye can always make himself heard in the world before a puny person can obtain an audience."<sup>1</sup>

While size must have been the first thing that attracted Hearn to Denny (Hearn repeated again and again, "Denny, I'd give all the brains in my head for the size and strength of your body"), there was still another point of contact. Denny had taken that enforced trip

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, December 10, 1878, "Big Men and Little Men."



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to the West Indies and so in him Hearn's curiosity uncovered a well of information.

From this start the friendship of these two mental and physical antipodes progressed until Denny made a habit of coming to his aunt's house two or three times a week, waiting around until Hearn had finished his supper when they would go out together, looking as illy-assorted as a bull and a burro. But they never got away into the darkness of the street without a parting admonition from Mrs. Courtney, "Now Denny, you wild boy, don't you let Mr. Hearn get into any trouble and be sure you don't leave him until you get him back to his own door." "All right, Aunt Maggie," Denny replied, "they'll do nothing to him until they get me."

There was more wisdom in Mrs. Courtney's warning than would appear to-day, for those were rough times and Hearn lived in the middle of a tough district where murders were so common that people carefully stayed indoors when they heard cries for help at night.

But Hearn was deaf to all warnings; he had other fish to fry, so, seizing Denny's arm to keep from stumbling on the uneven sidewalk, they started out through the dark and dangerous streets of New Orleans, lit only by faint infrequent stars of flickering gas lights. As he walked he was all a-twitter with the excitement of adventure to come and plied Denny with questions as to what was in store for him that night—any new brothel or inmate who might have some fantastic life history.

Arrived in the bawdy district, this strange couple walked for blocks past rows of one-story cribs with women lolling against the door-jambs making terms with customers or whispering with the furtive panders that infested the place. The police had passed a strict



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sumptuary edict—no woman should come to her open door unless she wore at least “a shift and a pair of stockings,” so all the denizens wore this regulation uniform of vice, but most added high-heeled slippers and a pair of red and green garters by way of coquetry. Fear of arrest kept them within the letter of the law, but they defeated police “prudery” by making their “shifts” so diaphanous that they became more suggestive than if entirely nude. Stopping to speak to this and that woman Hearn and Denny finally disappeared through the portals of one of the more pretentious houses of three stories. There were sounds of laughter and piano-playing as the door opened to let them in.

After hours spent in the patchouli-scented interiors of these places, they wandered out under the stars to sit in the park. The moonlight seemed to have a cleansing effect on Hearn's mind, the miasma of carnal lusts were swept completely from him, and he emerged the man of brain and education and intellectual interests. As he sat there overshadowed by the bulk of his huge companion, the marble gleam of a statue seen through magnolia leaves set spark to his loquacity and for an hour his soft voice would ramble on, talking of the wonders of Greek art. Evidently the mentality of his hearer failed to hamper Hearn's conversation for, years later, Denny summed up all his memories of these talks by saying, “Mr. Hearn, he loved statues and, beggin' yer pardon, de nooder de better and he offen sit in de park and tell me about 'em. I didn't know nuthin he was talkin' about, but I loved him.”

It was on one of these visits to a brothel that Hearn's fecund imagination and his easily aroused capacity for pity combined to place him in a position which so morti-

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fied him and hurt his vanity that he did not recover for months. He confided the facts to a friend who had called and found him depressed and nervous. Evidently hoping to purge himself of his troubles by confession, he burst out, "You know, I'm afraid I made an awful fool of myself. Ten days ago I visited a house of harlotry and there I saw a most beautiful woman. Her face had a look of perfect innocence and her features were faultlessly Greek. She made a tremendous impression on me. I did not believe that a woman could influence me so much. I looked at her with reverence, and I left before I had hardly touched her hand. But when I went home her face dogged me—I could not get her look of perfect innocence out of my mind. I could not sleep. I sat down and wrote a letter. I told her how much I suffered to see her in such surroundings, and I knew it was against her will that she was forced into such a life. I offered her my help, money, everything I had, to assist her to escape and to start afresh in another existence better suited to the woman she really was. I phrased it as delicately and considerately as I knew how. I could not have shown a queen more deference. And now I have just found out—she laughed when she got it and read it to the other girls mid screams of merriment. They took it as a joke and it didn't stop there. My letter has been travelling from hand to hand through the whole district."

It is always pitiful when a Sir Bayard comes to grief through the exercise of his most generous qualities. But for the romantic, unseasoned by the salt of common sense, episodes of a like kind are inevitable, and Hearn was a strange *mélange* of pessimism and idealism, suspicion and unbelievable gullibility.

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As time went on Hearn's wanderings with Denny became still more dubious and their trail led into opium dens which accounts for the strange nebulous quality that crept, for a while, into his contributions to the *Times-Democrat*. Luckily, however, it was only a passing addiction. But no matter how questionable this side of his life might be, he always kept the terms of his intimacy with Mrs. Courtney on a frank wholesome basis.

He was deeply grateful to her for her kindly care and thoughtfulness and expressed this feeling to Dr. Matas when he wrote him, some years later, from the West Indies, saying: "When you see my dear good landlady again, remember me to her; and don't let her get sick if an epidemic comes. You don't know how much I owe to her in regard to my health and success."

But this was not only a gratitude in retrospect, but an actual existent feeling during all the time of his intercourse with Mrs. Courtney. The letters which he wrote her during his temporary absences from New Orleans bear witness to this in every line.

His first trip came in the summer of 1884, when, fagged out and ill from a combination of malaria and hard work, Page Baker suggested that he go down to the little island in the Gulf, at the mouth of the Mississippi, called Grand Isle. Hearn jumped at the idea and when he told Mrs. Courtney, she spent all her spare time going over his scanty wardrobe, sewing on buttons and darning. Of course as soon as he reached there, he sent a note to her by return steamer.

"Grand Isle, August 28, '84.

"MY DEAR MRS. COURTNEY:

"This time I really 'take my pencil in hand' be-

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cause pen and ink are not quite convenient. I must say I have been enjoying myself very much in my own quiet sort of way. I take three swims every day, and the water is making me feel like a new man. The air is clear as a diamond. To tell you what Grand Isle is I must ask you to imagine a low grassy island with a beautiful sandy beach. There is no hotel, in the strict sense of the word. This used to be a Creole plantation; and the little white cabins used to be the slave-quarters. They are now remodelled so as to make cosy rooms. The dining room is a great big one-story building that might once have been a sugar house; and there are whole streets of little cottages. My room is small and cosy; and everybody leaves doors and windows open all day long. Nobody has ever had anything stolen here. There are birds and trees and insects innumerable; and 'mud-daubers' build their nests in every corner:—there are two under the top of my washstand. The board—(I know you want to hear about the board)—is very good. One does not need any wine here; the sea air is wine enough. I have a famous appetite and am getting well tanned. Kindest regards to Ella and Mr. Courtney.

“Very truly yours,

“LAFCADIO HEARN.”

The letters continued during his whole visit and were very different from the self-analytical, critical, almost literary essays, that he wrote to his more intellectual friends. They were frank, simple and full of real affection and so nicely adjusted to the mentality of their recipients. His effort was to find something likely to appeal to Mrs. Courtney's limited range of interests, as when he wrote:

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"I miss your nice beefsteaks, nice legs of mutton, nice cooking. Very little meat here,—and no eggs. Nothing but oysters, croakers, red fish, sheephead, crabs. I am going to turn into a fish and get scales! But we have plenty of cow's milk and biscuits and butter. The butter is not very good, and the cows eat so much wild camomile that the milk is a little bitter; but I have got to like it.

"Last night we had rain; and you ought to have heard the frogs. It sounded like a hundred thousand tin horns blowing a big frog's Christmas Eve. Near the house were little fellows who kept saying: 'Polly, Polly, Polly!' but the big fellows in the marsh kept blowing their tin horns. Other frogs said or seemed to say: 'Tea-table, tea-table, tea-table,' all the time."

Evidently little Ella became lonely without her Teller of Strange Tales and wrote him a note to which he replied:

"DEAR ELLA:

"I got your kind little note from Captain Hotard. 'There's money in the letter,' he said: 'but I had to tear a corner of the envelope so that I could carry it without violating the postal laws. He is a very nice little Creole gentleman—only about twenty-four years old: and he always tries to oblige every one. He asked your name, very politely; and I told him. Mr. Baker came down last night (Tuesday) and forty Jews went away,—so I am now able to take your mamma's kind advice, and try to think there are no Jews in the world.

"It is warm one moment here and cold the next, because there is so much rain and wind. I hope you



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have better weather in the city; and that you and your ma will keep well. You are getting to be such a nice big young lady now, that you ought to be able to look after your mamma, and see that she does not get sick. She took care of you so long,—ever since you were no bigger than a little chicken,—that it is your turn now to look after her, and take care of her—don't you think so?

“Well, dear Ella, you would really like the sea down here; and some day you will have a chance to enjoy it. If your ma could only see the pretty little groceries here,—right near the beach, with woods of oak trees behind them rising up like great green mountains, it would do her good. Think of a pretty cottage with balconies, and a platform behind as large as your parlours, with vines trained over it to keep the sun away. Looking one side you see orange-groves, and on the other a shady lane with hedges of oleander. That is your grocery. There are no streets, only green grass paths—quite high, like levees, and there is marsh on each side, where crabs and fish are. Every house is smothered with trees, and there is a smell of flowers everywhere. I wish the grocery belonged to your ma.

“Love, and thanks for your little letter,

“LAFCADIO HEARN.”

Hearn enjoyed the life on the island very much. Swimming, of course, was one of the few sports in which his lack of sight was no handicap, and as he had a large chest and was really strongly built, he soon found that he was easily able to outswim even the best of the islanders, which, naturally, earned their respect. Notwithstanding these relaxations Hearn did not neglect his work. He had heard the tale of the terrible tidal wave of 1856

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which destroyed L'Île Dernière, just to the west of Grand Isle. All the guests of a big summer hotel were dancing in the ball room when the wall of water struck the building and swept it from its foundations. Most of them were drowned, and the whole incident made such a deep impression that Hearn decided to find all the survivors of the catastrophe who were yet alive and to piece the story together. The results of his quest he published in the *Times-Democrat* of Sept. 14, 1884, under the title of "Torn Letters."

During his search for literary material among the islanders he also found the ingredients of a romance. "I am trying very hard at an anthropological, evolutionary, osteological love-story after the fashion of Pierre Loti," he wrote Page Baker. "I go to see the original heroine when I want inspiration. The family think I am rather a faithful visitor. The neighbours (aborigines of the island) have their little say. I really don't know whether . . . but no! I shall say nothing more." As a matter of fact, this island Venus, whose beauty was that of the "Tertiary Epoch," had made him an absolute slave to such an extent that he cherished dreams of marrying, raising large broods of sturdy children and supporting them all by the sweat of his brow, growing cauliflowers.

Rumour of this entanglement must have reached the acute ears of Mrs. Courtney, for she wrote him a rather upbraiding letter in which she told him of her troubles and intimated that he had stayed away too long. Unfortunately there remains only a mutilated half-sheet of his answer to her:

"You say I am a happy man to be away; but I do not know if you are quite right. One is not

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happy when one's best friends are not near nor when they are not with him. He is always a little worried about them."

In spite of the fascination of the dusky islander, Hearn continued to worry about Mrs. Courtney, and in what is possibly his next letter (he seldom dated them) he put his all at her disposal:

"MY DEAR MRS. COURTNEY:—

"Your letter came to make me feel both glad and sorry: I was glad to hear from you, and pained to know you were not feeling good. If I only had my wish, you would be so happy you would not know what to do. I fancy that the only serious trouble is the hot weather, which is weakening, but which will soon be over, and then you will feel all right again. Besides I will soon be back to make you feel jolly.

"I am sorry to hear times are so dull. Should you at any moment need any money, do not hesitate a moment to draw what money I have in the home-stead, and use it. Show Mr. Thos. McIntyre this letter if you wish, and take the money from him.

"Mr. Harris has just arrived with his wife. I am hesitating whether to stay over till Thursday or Saturday next. Mr. Baker simply made me very unhappy here. He seems to be my bad luck. I have got a superstition about him, and in spite of all I can do, I can't help showing my dislike. He is going to-morrow (Monday) and I think I will stay a little longer, just to be rid of him for a while.

"On the whole I have no pleasure here except the bathing and the pure air. In the sun it is awfully hot; but the evenings and the mornings are

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cool enough, and would be very pleasant were it not for the mosquitoes.

"I wish you were here for a while;—indeed I wish you were living here altogether, and that I could be here too,—not at the hotel where the crowds are, but in some nice little quiet place, under the trees. The nicest times I have had here have been with Italians and Frenchmen, Spaniards and Cajans—mostly fishermen or persons interested in the market business. With the guests of the hotel I have had very little to do. I find no pleasure in talking nonsense to young girls; and if I had to keep company with the people who frequent the dancing-saloon, I should not be able to stand it very long. But I have certainly got healthier and stronger since I came; and that is something. I had never felt right cross or nervous before Baker came. I am afraid he is my bad luck.

"Well I will soon be back, and forget all my little troubles here; and I will come with plenty of good work to do. If it was merely pleasure that I wanted I would not stay here: I am trying to prepare stories about the people. I trust you will not feel annoyed at my delay in coming back;—I wish I was with you again, and will soon be. But I feel I ought to try to write a little more before I go.

"With sincerest affectionate wishes,

"believe me ever yours

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

How Hearn escaped from Grand Isle a free man no one will ever know; but escape he did. He had no further holidays until Charlie Johnson, a Cincinnati friend, came to visit him in the spring of 1885. Then

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they arranged to take a trip together to Florida. The day after he reached his destination he wrote his old friend:

"The Everett, Jacksonville, Fla.

"April 16, 1885.

"MY DEAR MRS. COURTNEY:—

"I hope the sight of this ink will convince you that you have received a real letter,—as you have so often declared that those letters in pencil are the same as no letters at all, and perhaps you are right. We came here at about ten o'clock last night, after a very tiresome journey of about twenty-seven hours in the cars. The road was inconceivably dusty, and the scenery all the same from New Orleans to Jacksonville;—nothing but white pine trees, which one gets tired of looking at.

"Now the railroading is over and we take the boat—to sail to Silver Springs, which is supposed to be Ponce de León's 'Fountain of Youth.' I am gaining a great appreciation for home-comfort, by reason of my experience with Florida railroad restaurants. Johnson says that I am spoiled for travel,—because I expect to find what is not found outside of Mrs. Courtney's. So far, we have seen nothing that could interest you, or that interested us, but the trip is only beginning now. I think I shall go back next week, but am not quite sure. I will try to get back by boat if I can, as the railroad is too tiresome, and this may take longer.

"Very truly yours,

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

Scribbled on the back in pencil by Charlie Johnson, who accompanied him, is the following:



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"You have no idea how both Mr. Hearn and myself thought of you all day yesterday, while we were cracking our teeth and jaw-bones on alligator skin beefsteak and nondescript food of all possible and impossible sorts. We had glorious visions of the luscious meals we gorged with at your house continually before our eyes. Poor Hearn, dragged madly along, felt as unhappy as a little tarantula enclosed in a paper bag, and I had to nail his little grey cap to the seat to keep him from jumping out of the window in order to tramp back to New Orleans. This morning he is a little more resigned to his fate, while I feel as well as a fish in clear water. My best regards to you and Ella.

"C. F. JOHNSON."

Hearn paid for this trip to Florida, for it was there he contracted swamp fever which is not amenable to quinine, and he laid sick for two weeks after he got home, losing twenty-five or thirty pounds. Mrs. Courtney cared for him well however and saw that his meals were carried from her kitchen to his rooms at the corner of Robertson and Gasquet, a block away.

And so for the balance of his stay in New Orleans Hearn's relations with her continued on this same footing of sympathetic understanding and mutual helpfulness. Even after his final departure he continued to write at intervals, and she received letters from New York, the West Indies, Philadelphia—and finally he sent her a letter from Japan announcing his marriage and later one telling of the birth of his first son.

But life did not deal gently with Mrs. Courtney, hard work, worry and age had broken her. Strength

To my kindest and truest friend  
Mrs. M. Courtney,  
— by whose generous care  
and unselfish providing  
I recovered that health  
of mind and body  
without which no  
literary work can  
be accomplished,

Lafcadie Hearn

New Orleans, March 14, '87  
68 Gasquet St.

Fly leaf of the copy of "Chinese Ghosts" given by Hearn to Mrs. Courtney.

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was lacking for even her ordinary duties, so these letters were never answered and, finally, they ceased to come.

Thus rusted out one of Hearn's finest friendships, leaving nothing more to bear witness to its real sincerity than an inscription in an old copy of "Chinese Ghosts" written in Hearn's small, neat handwriting:

"To my kindest and truest friend

Mrs. M. Courtney,

—by whose generous care

and unselfish providing

I recovered that health

of mind and body

without which no

literary work can

be accomplished,

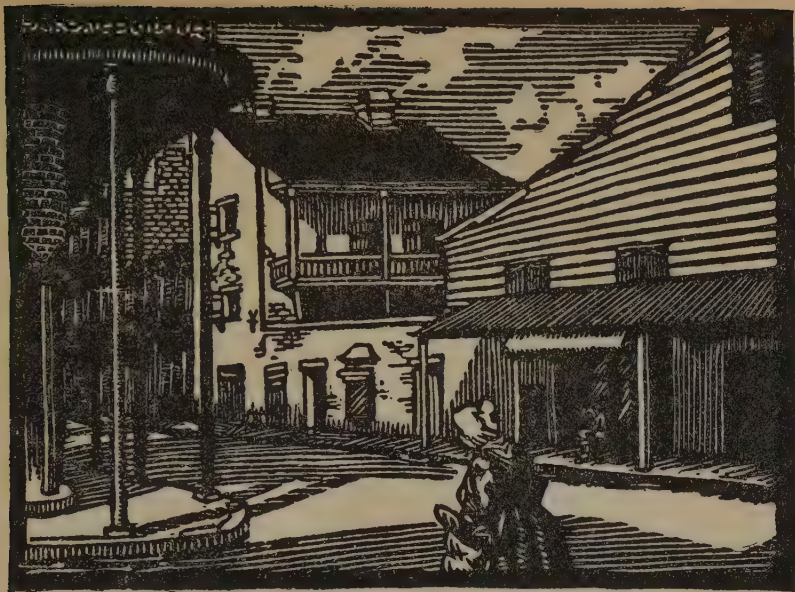
"LAFCADIO HEARN.

"New Orleans, March 14, '87.

"68 Gasquet Street."



"Denny"



## X: Dr. Matas

A BRILLIANT young Spaniard, Rodolpho Matas, had grown up in New Orleans and had graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons just about the time that Hearn began going to Mrs. Courtney's. This young doctor had a keen, natural interest in all things literary and this was much sharpened by his election to the editorship of the *Medical Journal*. He was anxious to meet Hearn, who had become the best known literary personage in Louisiana next to Cable, so he asked a friend of his who shared his office and knew Charles Whitney of the *Times-Democrat* to arrange to have Hearn visit him. Some time in the early part of 1882 Whitney inveigled him into going to the office and, although the doctor was considerably younger than Hearn, they immediately became interested in each

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other. Visits were exchanged, and soon a warm friendship was kindled by their mutual love of books and the intellectual stimulation which each produced on the other. The doctor was quick to see the germs of Hearn's future greatness and often predicted that some day he was sure to be a distinguished literary figure. Hearn, however, was not so quick to gauge the doctor's ability, and it was not until he had once asked him some questions about the great Arabian physicians and had heard him rattle off names and details that Hearn realized that the doctor was destined to be famous. Even then he was just a bit sceptical until he had consulted his own books and found every answer correct. After that they never passed the buildings of the Medical College, on their long night rambles which had become a habit, that Hearn did not say, "Some day you're surely going to be a Professor there."<sup>1</sup>

They often stayed up most of the night to wander miles all over the city in search of some stray incident or adventure that would serve to fire Hearn's imagination. As they walked they discussed, interminably, all sorts of queer subjects that appealed to Hearn's peculiar curiosities and trend of mind, such as, how long after death consciousness remains in the body—the fact that the system of training of Greek athletes caused them to become emasculated—and whether a negro's vocal cords differ in formation from those of a white man. Hearn contended for hours that only such physical difference could explain the timbre of a negro's voice or that typical "splintering" of notes, as he described it, that is so characteristic of their singing. Sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Hearn's prediction has been more than fulfilled. Dr. Matas is now head of the College and internationally known.



## Dr. Matas

Hearn spent the night at the doctor's rooms, and on these occasions he thought aloud, rehearsing the ideas he was going to use for an editorial or discussing the plot of one of his books. It seemed to clarify his thoughts. One evening he began to discuss Dr. Holland, an eminent divine of New Orleans, and advanced the surprising theory that, while the Reverend Doctor thought he was a Christian, he was, in reality, a pantheist. This thesis Hearn talked over for an hour, making his point by quoting from Dr. Holland's sermons. Within the next few days Matas was very much amused, and New Orleans scandalized, to see an editorial appear in the *Times-Democrat* which summarized their evening conversation. But there was one topic Hearn returned to again and again. He seemed to be keenly interested in everything pertaining to odours or their influence. Even when he was on the *Item* his concern in this subject had been absorbing, and descriptions of his own reactions to smell were continually finding their way into print, as when, in his attack upon the authorities for their brutality in confining criminals in the old Parish Prison, which was alive with bats, he, so vividly, analyzed the component parts of their terrific odour.

He had made it a point to translate all the articles about odours which he found in his French periodicals, including an essay by Dr. Noiroi,<sup>1</sup> which contained much strange information as to the customs of the ancients with regard to perfumes, one particularly picturesque paragraph of which quoted an English Act of Parliament of 1770 providing "that any woman who shall entice into marriage any of his Majesty's subjects by means of perfume, false hair or false hips shall be

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, October 26, 1878.

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condemned as a sorcerer and that the marriage shall be declared null and void."

Later he published another translation—that of a treatise by a certain Dr. Jager on "The Physiology of Smells."<sup>1</sup>

After advancing many shrewd arguments tending to prove the surprising thesis that the seat of the soul is in the nose and not in the heart, the navel, or the stomach, as other schools of thought aver, the good Doctor says,

"The fact is that we smell well or ill according to our physical condition; that sickness is apt to produce nasty exhalations and health a fresh odour by no means unpleasant—what has been called by French writers 'the perfume of youth!'<sup>2</sup> Little animals, young doves, puppies—all little creatures just entering upon life, have a pleasant odour. There is a fresh, pleasant smell about cleanly young children; and the hair of a girl has a natural perfume, sweeter than all the cosmetic odours Fashion drowns it with—what some Latin writers have dared to call 'the perfume of women!'"

The last phrase, "the perfume of women," suggests an odour of mystery or, possibly, more accurately, a mystery of odour that has persistently clung to Hearn's memory even until to-day. It is more than probable that Armand Hawkins, the old book dealer, gave it birth when, during the time he exhibited some antiques at the Chicago Exposition, he made the statement that Hearn had written and privately printed a book entitled "The

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, January 3, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase "perfume of youth" Hearn afterward expanded into a little essay to be found in "Exotics and Retrospectives," p. 221, under the title "Parfum de Jeunesse." It is evident this preoccupation followed him to Japan.

## THE HAUNTED AND THE HAUNTERS.



death and dissolution.

There are many people who hold that criminals should not be tortured. Humanitarians declare that the object of capital punishment is not punishment in reality, but only a necessary means of protecting society against crime. In order to save ourselves from being bitten by snakes we must kill the snakes; but we cannot blame the reptile for using its fangs according to the dictates of its ophidian proclivities.

We feel inclined to this belief ourselves. We do not consider that the cause of morality is aided in the least

In ancient times criminals were delivered to wild beasts, who tortured and devoured them.

In modern Louisiana criminals are delivered not to lions, tigers or panthers, to be devoured; but to certain fiendish winged things, which were anciently termed flitter-mice, and which possess, like certain monsters described by Rabelais, the power of stinking people to death.

The building chosen for the infliction of this dreadful punishment is an antiquated structure, modelled after the Spanish prisons of Colonial time, crowned with turrets from which vigilant sentries, armed with rifles, may slug those who strive vainly to escape from the silent fury of the odoriferous monsters.

Any wayfarer who lingers in the neighbourhood of Congo Square about sundown may behold the weird prison, and a vast flock of winged demons hovering above it, preparing to hold their ghastly revels under a gibbous moon.

He may also smell the ghoulish odour outshaken from the wings of the innumerable host of imps. The odour is never to be forgotten. It contains suggestions of many odours—decaying shoe-leather, miscarried eggs, and dead cats—and yet it is unlike any of these. It is an origi-

by delivering unhappy criminals to the bats. Better, we think, that the wicked be favoured with a speedy death than that they be slowly driven out of the world by the most indescribable of stinks.

But even granting, for the sake of argument, that it is right and proper that evil doers be delivered up to the bats;—granting even that they ought to be smeared all over with bat guano seven times a day—let us ask why should the innocent be made to suffer with the guilty?

Why should property be depreciated in the immediate neighbourhood of the prison and beyond it by the wild and savage violence of the stink?—why should unoffending and law-abiding citizens be compelled to bear the punishment of convicts?—why should no efforts be made to prevent the stench from extending over a square mile of peaceable neighbourhood?—why in short should not the bat-torture be inflicted only without the corporate limits of the city?

Why? Oh! Why?

Is there no sulphur, no carbolic acid, no gunpowder, no vitriol, no dynamite in Louisiana? Is there no balm in Gilead?

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Perfume of Women," and that this book, of which not more than thirty copies had been made, was presented by Hearn to his intimate friends. Hawkins even went so far as to boast that he had received one himself which was then securely reposing in his safe in New Orleans.

Corroboration for Hawkins' statement came from a very unexpected source. When in 1896 Eugene Field published "The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac" he included a curious chapter on "The Odours That My Books Exhale," in which he said of Hearn: "Lafcadio Hearn once wrote a treatise upon perfumes, an ingenious and scholarly performance; he limited the edition to fifty copies and published it privately—so the book is rarely met with." In view of this perfectly positive statement is it not strange that no trace of any such mysterious volume has ever appeared? Was the book so pornographic that all of his friends who received copies entered into a conspiracy to suppress it? Was Eugene Field only poking subtle fun at Hearn by attributing to him a purely apocryphal book, or had Field talked with Hawkins either in Chicago or New Orleans and then parroted his information? Who knows? At any rate, none of Hearn's friends have admitted seeing any such book and, even Hawkins, when questioned on the subject after Hearn's death, flatly contradicted his statement made in Chicago and insisted he had never heard of any book of the kind, although he finally admitted he had had certain little sketches and rhymes made by Hearn, which were of so suggestive a nature that he had burned them. When Hawkins died nothing resembling the book in question was found among his effects or in his safe. The evidence supporting the reality of such a book is indeed tenuous,



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but Hearn was so absorbed in the subject that it was just the sort of thing he would have been likely to have done. He discovered smell preoccupations in other authors, notably Pierre Loti. To Osman Edwards he wrote of him, "No other literary man living sees and hears and *smells*<sup>1</sup> and thrills so finely as he," and in Huysmans and Baudelaire he discerned a kindred keenness. What Hearn thought, spoke and read of, he wrote about—which is, of course, one of the strongest arguments for the theory that "The Perfume of Women" was written.

One other possible explanation has been advanced by the proprietor of a second-hand book shop in New York—a man of generous girth and sound book-lore—who said that in 1912 an old newspaper man who had worked on the *World* used frequently to visit his shop and talk of Hearn. This reporter said he had known him well, often meeting him in Will Coleman's book-shop under the old Astor House. One day, he declared, Hearn launched into a very interesting talk on the influence of perfumes. A gentleman interrupted and, introducing himself as one of the largest perfumery manufacturers of the city, asked Hearn to write him a treatise on the influence of perfumes which might be used for advertising. This Hearn agreed to do. At a later meeting he told the reporter he had completed the article and had been paid for it.

It is possible that Hearn may have mailed a few copies of this pamphlet (if he wrote it) to his friends, which may have been the genesis of the story. But even this tale is surrounded by an atmosphere of vagueness, for the said bookman could not remember the name of

<sup>1</sup> Italics are the author's.



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his informant and was unable to trace him, as he had returned to the West. This very uncertainty, however, has its silver lining, for it leaves a mystery, exhaling an odour of old books, upon which the bibliomaniac may exercise his wits—and such intriguing problems have become so pitifully few, thanks to the modern efficiency of our literary sleuths.

But whether such a book was written or not cannot change the fact that Hearn had an olfactory sense as keen as that undoubtedly possessed by our prehistoric ancestors and, for this reason, enjoyed perfumed pleasures (and probably pains) unknown to the average mortal. Even the construction of his nose seemed to indicate abilities in this direction, for it was long and aquiline, with finely cut nostrils that had a trick of quivering when he was excited or deeply interested, like an animal that scents danger or the presence of its mate.

As an artist is fascinated by colours, whose subtle variations mean much to his trained eye, so was Hearn deeply concerned with the subtle variations of odour that were constantly assailing his supersensitive nostrils, and it was these reactions that he talked much about on his midnight wanderings with Dr. Matas. In fact, he bragged of his keenness in this direction, and often said that he could tell the difference, by this sense alone, between octoroons, quadroons and pure-blooded Africans. Nor was this anything new with him, for as far back as 1878 he had discussed in an *Item* editorial, called "An Odorous Subject,"<sup>1</sup> the possibilities of each race, and even hybrid, having its own peculiar, recognizable odour.

<sup>1</sup> "An Odorous Subject.

"In the recently republished analysis of blood stains, made in a murder trial by Dr. Joseph Jones, there are some very curious facts stated which have more or less bearing on the question of the development of the sense

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As if this was not sufficiently remarkable, he went even further and said he could tell, in the same manner, the difference between a blonde and a brunette.<sup>1</sup> Of course these peculiarities interested the Doctor from a physiological point of view, and he attempted to explain them to Hearn by saying that Nature was trying to compensate him for a subnormal vision by giving him a supernormal sense of smell. While this may be, to a

<sup>1</sup> A storiette published in the *Item*, July 1, 1881, called "The Tale of a Fan," and afterwards republished in *Fantastics*, p. 166, is an interesting corroboration. In it Hearn says: "There are blonde and brunette odours:—the white rose is sweet, but the ruddy is sweeter; the perfume of pallid flowers may be potent, as that of the tuberose whose intensity sickens with surfeit of pleasures, but the odours of deeply tinted flowers are passionate and satiate not, quenching desire, only to rekindle it."

of smell in man. The Doctor in his testimony seemed to hint that each variety of the human race has its own peculiar odour, like inferior animal races; and that the odour peculiar to the negro is discernible even in the blood from which it may be liberated by chemical analysis.

"We may also infer that the odour has its gradations of power and peculiarity through all the various shades of colour; that the odour of the mulatto and quadroon differs from that of unmixed negro blood and from each other; and that all varieties of hybrid possess perfumes peculiar to themselves.

"Perhaps, also, the distinction of smell is not confined merely to races and their hybrids.

"Perhaps we may yet discover that each branch of the human family, each nation of the earth has a smell of its own; that the Scotchman, Irishman, Spaniard, Portuguese, Italian, have each an intrinsic odour; and that Jack-the-Giant-Killer's Giant only anticipated the discoveries of science when he uttered the memorable 'Fee, faw, fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!'

"This theory seems to obtain strong circumstantial evidence in its favour from the extraordinary power of scent displayed by dogs. The dog's olfactory sensitiveness appears to enable him to detect all the finer shades of human smell—the odour peculiar to each individual; and his ability in this regard really appears little short of miraculous. It has been averred by scientists that the human senses are by no means developed to their full extent; that, in fact, some of them have developed appreciably within the last two thousand years. It has been claimed that the Greeks of the Homeric period had no idea of the colour blue.

"The word representing the idea of that colour can not be found in Homeric epics or the Homeric hymns. Much interesting discussion has arisen upon this subject, with the result of proving that the eye is yet a very imperfect optical instrument, that its powers are yet but partially developed; and that it is quite probable the human race may in course of time develop other senses of which it knows at present nothing whatever.

"Perhaps the curious facts recorded in regard to somnambulistic clairvoyance may prove some day to have been only records of individual cases in which a sixth or seventh sense had obtained a slight development.

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certain degree, true, still heredity also had a great deal to do with it, for other male members of the Hearn family had the same quivering nostrils and sensitive olfactory perceptions.

It is to be feared that of the two the Doctor gave the more actual, friendly service. Hearn furnished mental stimulation and companionship, but it was the Doctor who cared for Hearn whenever he was ill with fever,

"If the sense of sight be perhaps still imperfect, however, the sense of smell is certainly so. The human olfactories do not compare in power and development with those of the canine species.

"Our sense of smell is at present chiefly useful in enabling us to avoid and detect the presence of such forms of decomposition as are prejudicial to health, and to seek the neighbourhood of all that is fresh, lifegiving, pure and agreeable.

"It may come to pass, however, that this sense may yet be developed to a greater pitch of usefulness. Future physicians might, by smell alone, be enabled to detect the exact nature of an ailment on entering the presence of a patient; and romanticism might rejoice in the discovery that youth and beauty in women is marked by a perfume like that of the garments of the Salamites—'a smell as of Lebanon,' a perfume like that of the ideal maid 'whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers.' Indeed there are romanticists of this present era who claim as much; poets who aver that the presence of a beautiful woman is sweet to the sense as the passage of those Rabbinical angels who left rich perfumes as memories of their visits in the dwellings of the faithful.

"Baudelaire, the French translator of Edgar Poe—and much of an Edgar Poe himself—was one of these. Baudelaire possessed an abnormally delicate sense of smell. '*Mon âme*,' he cries, '*voltige sur les parfums comme l'âme des autres hommes voltige sur la musique.*' (My soul soars upon perfume as the souls of other men soar upon music.) He praised the perfume of his mistress's hair—'hair smelling of the South,' as Swinburne would say—more than aught else. Let us quote a few of his lyricisms: 'From her elastic and heavy locks, a living coffer of perfume, a censer of the nuptial chamber, exhales a sweet, wild, savage smell; and a perfume as of fur from the muslin and velvet robes impregnated with the spirit of her pure youthfulness. . . . Fair strange goddess, dark like the nights, thy perfume is a mingling of odours of musk and of Havana. . . . O rich hair, the romance of a languorous Asia and a tropical Africa, lives in thee, as in an aromatic forest. . . . Thou containest, Ebony sea, wild dazling dreams of sails, rowers, flames and masts; and I inebriate myself with the confused odours of sea and tropical land—of cocoa oil, and musk, and tar. . . . O my Queen, my adored one, I fancy I can smell the perfume of thy blood.' How far Baudelaire's sense of smell was developed, it is hard to say—especially as he had a great passion for describing the charms of Malabareses, and Hindoo girls, and dark Venuses belonging to the notably odorous races, but out of some 200 odes contained in the last edition of his '*Fleurs du Mal*,' or '*Poison Flowers*,' there is scarcely one in which he does not give vent to rhapsodies upon smells.

"Unfortunately his most artistic pieces are too naughty for quotation."

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and who materially improved his eyesight by his medical advice. He and Mrs. Matas supplied a great deal of the material which Hearn used and she, it is to be remembered, furnished most of the recipes for “La Cuisine Creole,” and many of the negro proverbs for “Gombo Zhèbes.” In addition, she lent him a quaint list of Creole remedies which contained such gems as these two cures for yellow fever—“cut open a living pigeon and apply it on the head of the patient, or, if this does not cure, make an infusion of green coffee beans and whiskey and administer it three times a day.” This information he finally used in an article on Creole medicine which was published by the New York *Tribune*. When Hearn returned the list, he enclosed it in a long envelope which he addressed in the Arabic manner and lavishly ornamented it with Arabic script.

Hearn conceived the idea of expanding “Torn Leaves” into “Chita” and he discussed the plot with the Doctor at least a hundred times, and as it progressed, he got from him all the Spanish sentences which he used and also a correct description of the symptoms of a patient suffering with and dying from yellow fever. Indeed Hearn obtained so much help from him that he called it “our book” which is sufficient explanation of its dedication:

“To my Friend,  
Dr. Rodolpho Matas  
of  
New Orleans.”

Their great intimacy continued as long as Hearn remained in New Orleans and, when he left, there was no cloud upon their friendship, and yet—it was later to be blighted, as were so many others.





## XI: Straddling Canal Street

“THE city of New Orleans really contains within itself several little cities, which have preserved their individuality for generation and generation. The old French town proper is as much isolated from the rest of New Orleans as though it still wore the ancient girdle of rampart and moat. We know of people living there, and who have lived there for fifty or sixty years, who know as little about the district south of Canal Street as though it were a portion of Thibet or Patagonia. Proud of the fact too, are these good folk, and under no condition would they suffer themselves to venture South of Canal Street. Meanwhile the American population strives to spread beyond the barrier, and domicile itself in France; but it makes slow progress,



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and infinite are the discouragements opposed to it. In the old days when the neighbourhood of the French theatre was one blaze of coffee houses, restaurants, billiard rooms, etc., it used to be somewhat unsafe for American strangers to enjoy themselves in that quarter. Even at the theatre one ran the risk of being informed that his head was an object of annoyance—*Votre tete me gêne, Monsieur*. Naturally the party addressed would attempt to move so as not to obstruct the view of the stage, when he would be coolly told it was simply the *sight of his head* which caused so much unpleasantness. A retort, a slap, a scuffle, a separation, a duel and a funeral would follow with the rapidity of a five-act drama. But the times have changed.”<sup>1</sup>

When Hearn arrived in New Orleans the battle was still raging, but with diminished fury. The wealthy old Creole families, stripped by the war of everything except their traditions of pride and luxury, were still opposing the efforts of the energetic commercial Nordic Americans to wrest social and economic supremacy from them—but they were fighting a losing fight.

The enmities and hates and bitternesses which were the product of that contest were yet smouldering, even though they did not break out in open insults in the theatres.

This is why Hearn gradually grew to have two sets of friends—one below Canal Street (the Creoles) and the other above (the Americans), and each group knew little of his connection with the other.

The Bakers had been responsible for introducing him to the Americans, and he was welcomed into the inner

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, March 23, 1879. This was written by Hearn.

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circle of a little salon made possible by the charm and social tact of Mrs. A. C. Durno. She had taken charge of her brother's (James B. Guthrie) household at the death of her sister-in-law in order that she might give a woman's care to her young niece and nephew. She was cultured, had literary ability, and during her spare time wrote poems, stories and a Sunday column of book-reviews for the *Times-Democrat*.

The charm of the modest little one-storied house at 1458 Constance Street, with its arched verandahs, hiding behind flowering shrubs, was well known by the literati (American) of New Orleans, and they used to gather there at select little soireés. There was always good music, Lina Little sang every time she came to New Orleans and Mrs. Mary Ashley Townsend, who signed poetry of distinction with the pen name of Xariffa, often recited her new poems, or Mrs. Mollie Moore Davis read one of her charming Southern stories. Professor Ficklen of Tulane University, Mrs. Adele Stanton, Marion Baker and a few, very few, others completed the circle. One of these, however, was destined to influence Hearn's thought in a very important way. It was Lieut. Oscar Terry Crosby, a nephew of Mrs. Durno. He had graduated from West Point about 1880 and, soon after, was detailed to the Engineer Corps in New Orleans, where he had met and married one of the beautiful Boulogny girls and had taken her to live at the hospitable house presided over by his aunt, Mrs. Durno. It was Crosby who first induced Hearn to read Herbert Spencer's "First Principles," a book that had the most tremendous influence in maturing his thought. He himself admitted this and wrote:

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“A very positive change has been effected in my opinions by the study of Herbert Spencer. He has completely converted me away from all isms, or sympathies with isms; at the same time he has filled me with vague but omnipotent consolation of the Great Doubt. I can no longer give adhesion to the belief in human automatism,—and that positive scepticism that imposes itself upon an undisciplined mind has been eternally dissipated in my case.”<sup>1</sup>

Hearn developed a deep affection, mixed with a sort of hero worship, for this intellectual young soldier, and so great was his influence over him that when Mrs. Durno wanted to drag Hearn out of some corner, where he had been driven by shyness, she always depended upon Crosby to do it. A few tactful questions or a statement anathema to Hearn was sufficient to start him. As he warmed to his subject, his self-consciousness sloughed away and his soft voice seemed to have a strange, compelling charm that gradually brought every personality into the circle of its sound and sway. His conversation flowed harmoniously, smooth and rich in the colour of his words. In fact the cadence of his phrases was so melodious as to give an impression that his speech was produced by some unknown and delicate musical instrument rather than that it came from human vocal cords. His marvellous memory, that enabled him to quote anything he had ever read, illuminated his conversation with bits of the strangest and most unusual information; and his literary opinions were as vivid and continental as if he had just landed from Paris. There was the controlled fire of passion in his talk, too, for he

<sup>1</sup> Letter to O'Connor. Bisland's "Life and Letters," p. 365.

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perceived beauty through his emotions rather than through his mind and his ideas on Art meant literally more to him than his life. But why try to describe the brilliance of his conversation? There is none like it to-day. With the multiplication of libraries and books of reference on every conceivable subject, with the specializations of man's work into narrow fields, human minds have become mere card catalogues—they only know where, entombed in books, they can find the information they need. The day of scintillating general conversation has passed—no longer is it practised as an art—men of ideas save them to sell in print. All that remains to us is the technical talk of specialists and the jargon of the golf course or card table.

Luckily a description of his hostess and these gatherings is preserved in Hearn's own handwriting in a letter to Krehbiel postmarked May 19, 1885. In discussing the various "lady-writers" of the *Times-Democrat*, Hearn, after saying "Mrs. Durno was the noblest woman of the whole lot," continued:

"She writes stories and poems for us under several noms de plume, such as 'Ada Sturgess,' 'Felix Gray,' etc. A charming, talented, unassuming, kind-hearted lady, who has a quiet little salon which very few friends visit. The meetings are such that you would like,—artists, newspapermen, young army officers occasionally, all brilliant fellows and companionable. I am one of the coterie (except as far as the brilliancy), can't blow my own horn, you know. It was she who sent you the score of the clo's pole vendor's song, which you never said a word about."

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Hearn, however, always a demophobe, enjoyed far more his quiet afternoon visits to Mrs. Durno, when he could sit on the verandah, continuously rocking, and talk of the battle being waged in Paris between the Realists and Romanticists or discuss with young Crosby the tenets of Herbert Spencer.

One afternoon Hearn was there, kicking out his feet in a funny way every time he rocked backward, when Crosby, who was both an electrical and gunnery expert, began to talk of the part electricity would play in the next big war. Hearn became tremendously interested and plied him with all sorts of questions and finally said, "You have given me an idea," but steadfastly refused to divulge it.

A few days later an article appeared on the first page of the *Times-Democrat*. It was played up as the chief news leader.

### "EDISON'S LATEST"<sup>1</sup>

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"FULL AND INTERESTING PARTICULARS  
OF THE WIZARD OF MENLO  
PARK'S LAST DIS-  
COVERY

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"ELECTRICITY SUBSTITUTED FOR GUNPOWDER.  
ASTOUNDING RESULTS OF EXPERI-  
MENTS AT HOBOKEN  
(Special to the *Times-Democrat*)

"New York, March 31.—Within a few hours I expect to witness one of the most astounding events

<sup>1</sup> *Times-Democrat*, April 1, 1882. Dr. Rodolpho Matas has informed me that this was written by Hearn.



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in the history of modern science—the first experiment with electricity as a substitute for artillery in warfare, and even for the heaviest ordnance. If I may trust the evidence of my senses and reasoning, there is no form of artillery, not even the 72-ton Krupp, which can fling a monster shell to a distance of fifteen miles, nor the 100-ton Armstrong gun, which could be compared for an instant with the frightful scientific weapon that I have just been examining. It is not within my power to describe the scientific principle involved, of which Mr. Alva Edison is the discoverer,—inasmuch as the inventor has not yet secured his patent, and I am informed upon the authority of a distinguished officer of the United States Artillery, that Mr. Edison is determined, if possible, to confide his secret only to the government. I reminded my informant that the secrets both of Greek fire and gunpowder, were betrayed in times past by those to whom they had been confided. He told me that he believed this invention had a far better prospect of remaining a government secret, inasmuch as it need only be confided to one or two trustworthy persons, who would be necessarily among the most learned men in the United States. I asked him if any officers now on the rolls would be one of these, in case the invention were purchased or adopted. He said he did not think so. ‘I know of no military officer in the world,’ he added, ‘capable of utilizing the secret. Its practical application requires a knowledge of chemistry, physics and electricity especially, which no military officer can possess.’ ‘Then,’ I returned, ‘the duty of future armies will be simply to protect some grey-haired savant, charged with the electrical duty?’ ‘Probably,’ he answered with a somewhat

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sickly smile. At 6 P.M. Edison allowed us to inspect his invention. I can describe it only very imperfectly. It resembles somewhat the machinery used to lower, heighten, and point the Ross telescope; but appears to be much more intricately constructed. At the lower part is a large steel wheel, with handles like those upon a pilot's wheel; and the polished edge is marked with a double row of numbers of mathematical combinations. When the wheel is moved an immense double needle also moves, but moves in a contrary direction. Its upper point corresponds with the outer circle of figures; its lower point with the inner circle. This apparatus regulates aim, range and distance. For example: When the upper end of the needle touches twelve of the outer circle of numbers, and the lower point 150 of the inner circle, the discharge is regulated for a distance of twelve miles with a sweep of 150 yards. The double needle does not rotate, but simply describes a half circle so that its motion can only vary from a perpendicular to a horizontal position, moving to the left hand. When horizontal the extreme capacity of the machine is reached—distance 25 miles, sweep-range three miles and a half. These figures seem monstrous, incredible even as I write them! Within the outer wheel is an inner wheel with a single needle, both moving inversely to the outer wheel, and another circle of numbers. This regulates height of range while the other regulates breadth and force. Yet so wonderful is the interrelation of all its parts, that one movement directs all these operations of the machine. The weapon itself resembles in shape a spirit-level tube more than anything else, and is upward of twenty feet in length, and about four

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inches in diameter. It is formed of flawless glass, is hollow, closed at both ends, flattened at one end like a disc. In this disc is fixed a hollow steel rod, sighted like the barrel of a telescope rifle, and reaching into the glass cylinder, a distance of some two feet, where it connects with an enormous coil of delicate wire almost as fine as the hair spring of a watch. This wire had its extremity in a separate compartment of the tube, which appeared to be filled with a liquid as volatile as ether. I asked Edison what it was. 'Electricity,' he answered,—'electricity compressed to the point of liquefaction—that is the secret. My machine is useless in the hands of any man ignorant of my secret. He cannot charge it. I have succeeded in concentrating electricity to such a degree that I can store the force of 150,000,000,000 horses into the space of twelve feet square.' 'What is the force of the present charge?' I asked. 'It is equal,' he replied, 'to an explosive force of 500,000 tons of dynamite. But it is wholly subject to my will. I master it and regulate it as I please. I can discharge it all in the fraction of an instant, or liberate it in one long continued flow which will last for nearly five days.'

"We leave in about five minutes more for the scene of the experiment. The machinery will be in order and in place about ten o'clock this evening on the farm of Mr. Nathaniel R. P. Nettleton at Hoboken, who is a wealthy man and a stockholder in the Edison Light Co. Mr. Nettleton has contributed a flock of sheep—43 in number—to the expenses of the undertaking. I am told that Mr. Loewen, of Brooklyn, has also sent on a number of horses and mules—mostly, of course, in a broken down condition. For obvious reasons the range

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will be limited to five miles. All precautions possible will be taken against accident. Yours hurriedly, L.B.

“Hoboken, 1:45 A.M.—The experiment has been terrifically successful. At this hour I regret I will not be able to give fuller details. We arrived on the ground about sundown. The range had been staked off the entire distance with barbed wire fencing to a height of five feet. The ground was very irregular; but this fact, Edison said, mattered nothing, as the novel artillery would be posted on a height near the farmhouse, commanding the whole length of the range. Unfortunately there was an unexpected delay in arranging the machinery.

“Everything was ready about midnight. On the knoll near Nettleton’s house the electric cannon was finally brought into position. A powerful electric reflector cast its gleam along the range, and through a small telescope the sheep could be distinctly perceived at the farther end. According to Edison’s instructions, all had been tethered. The larger animals were tied up in the rear, at a distance of some twenty yards.

“At 12:33 A.M. the signal was given by a pistol shot. Instantly every eye was riveted on the immense cannon of glass. Under the revolutions of the great wheel, moved by Edison’s hand, we saw the vitreous cylinder balance itself gradually, like a telescope, to a nearly horizontal position. ‘Twenty-seven one-hundredths,’ shouted Edison. ‘Twenty-seven one-hundredths,’ answered his assistant, on the other side of the wheel. ‘Twenty-seven and one-ninetieth.’ ‘And one-ninetieth.’ ‘And one ninety-one seven and seventeen-eighths.’

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‘All right, Ready!’ It was exactly 12:42. ‘One!’ cried Edison: ‘TWO! T H R E E !’

“There was no report—but a sharp hissing sound like the escaping of steam, and a vast, blinding, blazing flash—a stream of lightning which seemed for the moment to stretch to the extreme verge of the horizon. Then all was dark again—or at least comparatively dark, for the electric reflector still lightened the track.

“We visited the farther end of the range on horseback. The sheep lay motionless in their places. There was a strong smell as of cooked meat. We touched the carcass of the nearest one and the skin came off under the hand. The animals were literally cooked to a bone. Farther on, the mules and horses lay,—cooked as though parboiled! On either side of the track some hundred yards in width, the barbed steel wire had finally disappeared. We found portions of it melted, among the grass. The grass itself was crisped, curled up and dried as by a mighty heat. On attempting to remove the carcasses of the animals, they fell apart, crumbled into shapelessness. Had ten thousand men been standing upon the track of the lightning, they would have been annihilated within the fraction of a second. The trunks of apple trees in the neighbourhood were split open, and the ground covered with splinters and branches. Will write more fully to-morrow. Impossible as yet to give complete account of this astounding experiment. As I write these lines, the United States officials are reporting to the War office. The capacity of the machine may be judged from the fact that only 1-14000 part of the charge was discharged.

“Later,—I have heard from Edison that the in-



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vention is far less complicated than I had supposed. He says that any thorough electrician could learn to manipulate and charge the new artillery after a few weeks of instruction and study. The New York *Herald* will send private specials to General Moltke,—by cabled request, Edison himself to manipulate the telegraph instrument. It now seems probable that Edison can sell his invention to the highest bidder.

“L.B.”

Letters from all over Louisiana poured into the *Times-Democrat* office for more information about Edison's terrific invention, but their writers had failed to notice that the day upon which the article had appeared was April Fool's day.

Crosby and Hearn enjoyed many a chuckle over it afterwards.

Between Mrs. Durno and Hearn there had sprung up the pleasant give and take of fellow craftsmen bound by intellectual sympathies and a sincere liking and respect for each other, which often encouraged her to seek his criticism and literary advice. With this in mind sometime in 1884, she sent him one of her poems called:

### “THE YUCCA.”

“With sullen, frowning front it stands,  
Hostile, as if in savage lands,  
With bayonets fixed and interlaced,  
The wild stampeding hordes it faced.

“Unsung of bird, unloved of breeze,  
Amid the swaying myrtle trees,

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Safe circled from all fell mischance,  
It scowls, with ready-lifted lance.

"A very Ishmaelite it seems,  
Who yields no truce, or even dreams  
'Twere good, at last to lower spear,  
And let some friendly thing creep near.

"Yet, while its warrior watch it keeps,  
Within its secret heart there sleeps  
One sweet white thought that swells and swells,  
Until a tower of gleaming bells

"Stands trembling on the sacred height;—  
One sweet white thought, where all the light  
From wheeling stars and changing moons,  
And all the disregarded boons

"Of morning rain and evening dew  
Are garnered up,—and shine anew  
Fraught with a rare barbaric grace  
That witches all the garden place.

"ADA STURGES.

"New Orleans,  
"June 29, 1884."

Hearn wrote her immediately, using the pen name with which she had signed the poem.

"To 'Ada Sturges':—

"I am glad I did not read 'The Yucca' yesterday, as it is now more possible for me to tell you how it pleased me, having a chance to write a line. It was as sweet as the 'white sweet thought' you sang of,—and indeed the theme is so strangely beautiful that

## Straddling Canal Street

I wonder it never occurred to Southern poet before. I shall never see a Spanish bayonet again without thinking of the simile,—jealously defending beauty with Oriental grimness. Really the train of fancies your little poem evoked is very long and curious; one sees in the plant a thousand things not dreamed of before;—the chatelaine with her dark escort of lances,—some strange battle-rally about a White Lady,—a treasury defended by sleepless swordsmen, etc., etc. But I think it also reminds one of certain grim, rude, terrible men, who inspire fear and hate to most of those who know them, but whose hearts, for all that, contain treasures of price, which only some fair woman may open.

“Yours sincerely,

“L. HEARN.”

Quite evidently Hearn regarded the little poem as, in part, a very subtle description of his own prickly character which kept at a distance so many possible friends, and this his last sentence rather pathetically admits.

Echoes of their verandah talks are found in another letter which he wrote Mrs. Durno from Grand Isle.

“DEAR MRS. DURNO:

“Once upon a time an Illinois farmer said unto his son, William: ‘Bill, go fetch a log,—the fire’s goin’ out, an’ it’s gettin’ mighty cold.’ Bill went for that log. The father waited. An hour.—Two hours.—Three hours.—Twenty-four hours.—A week.—Many weeks.—Many Months!—Through Eternal Years. . . .

“And the father grew ancient, by dint of much association with old-fashioned Father Time: he

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

saw his children's children's children 'planted'—just so many potatoes. He saw steamboats, railroads, electric lights, come into fashion. He heard afar off, like the roll of an earthquake, the Voice of the war. And he waited still for that log. . . .

"And at last, one cold winter's evening, a great and very aged tramp came to the farmer's gate, carrying a log on his shoulders,—and passed through, and entered the house, and hurled the great log upon the blazing fire, and swore for fatigue, and shouted: 'Say, Dad,—there's yer old log!' And the father sat there, smoking his pipe,—appearing in no wise astonished. And he says, says he: 'Seems to me, Bill, that you took a dog-goned long time to fetch that log! . . .'

"I am like unto Bill: I fetch my log, but I take a terrible old time to do it. . . . I owed you a reply to your kind letter; and all sorts of things kept me from answering.—No: the struggle between Positivism and Romanticism has not obliterated me; but here I am a Romantic only. I have almost forgotten the name of Herbert Spencer. I have become oblivious of books, authors,—indifferent to poets and theologians: I am a companion unto frogs! Wop—wop—wop, they go—over the floor at night. I am bathing in blue light, in liquefied sun, in dreams of the Silences and the Eternities. But sometimes I am harshly awakened to the Realities, by a smell of musk: think of it! musk among the flowers, the frogs, the birds, the perfumed breath of kine! Only a passing Jew! I am, dear Mrs. Durno, in Jerusalem! Not, unfortunately, as a Crusader. I long for some occidental contact!—Some Gentile presence. I rush to the society of boatmen, Acadians, Malays, Chinese,

## Straddling Canal Street

cotton jammers, shrimp-fishers, net-makers,—just to flee from the Orient. I am sick of the Orient. There is too much Orient here! Can't you and Mr. Durno come to the rescue?—can't Lieutenant Crosby be persuaded to share my pilgrimage?—can't something be done? . . . I expect the worst, nevertheless; and when forced to face these long-nosed facts, I long for the pleasant conclave of Annunciation Street.

“Very truly, with best regards to all

“LAFCADIO HEARN.”

“P.S.—You remember the form of my nose? It has already become altered: it is lengthening—Orientalizing. Some awful anthropological and ethnologic change must be taking place within me!

“L. H.”

It is strange, this anti-Semitic feeling of Hearn, because careful investigation does not show any particular basis for it—no incident by which he could rationalize it as he had done in the case of the Jesuits by attributing to them a plot to deprive him of his heritage from Mrs. Brenane. This antipathy grew rather than diminished until in 1885 or 1886 he wrote an editorial called “The Jewish Question in Europe,” which was so abusive that Page Baker refused to print it.

He wrote a note to Baker, by the way, soon after he sent the one to Mrs. Durno, which is the most perfect epic of laziness, if one can use such an energetic word to describe so lethargic a condition, that has ever been written in the English language.

“DEAR PAGE:

“By the vacillating flame of the tallow-dip,—



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

after twenty-four hours of hideous struggle with a remorseful conscience,—I pen these lines. I ought to be home; I ought to be working; I ought to be performing my duty; I ought not to overstay the term you so kindly gave me; I ought anyhow to have attempted to send in some MS. And none of these things have I been able to suffer myself to do. The curse of unthinkable laziness has come upon me. A week ago I began this letter in ink; to-day I try to finish it in pencil, and every bone aches with the aching of laziness unspeakable. I shall be in the city by the time you get this. I am writing just because I feel it a duty to close the correspondence in a proper manner.

“To-day I received the envelope containing the *Sun* criticism of Drumont's book. May the shadow of Drumont spread across the world! He is a blessed good man!

“Meanwhile, here, some consolation has arrived. The Christians are in the majority again;—the time has passed when the fiendish Solomon Baer could truthfully observe with a wicked leer that ‘a handful of powder would blow to h—ll all the Christians here.’ The pretty Jewesses have departed; Gentile maidens have come. The rain has past; and the world floats all cloudlessly in the infinite Blue Ghost.

“The only affliction is a nettle-fish,—a revolving bottle of vitriol,—which burns the skin like red-hot iron. In spite of these things I would gladly remain here forever,—did I not feel that I am becoming absolutely demoralized by laziness. I never felt so damnably lazy in my whole life: there is a droning in my ears as of innumerable bees; ideas are shaped with horrible difficulty,—and expressed only in a disgustingly cloudish manner; there is a lotos-

## Straddling Canal Street

weakness in the lukewarm air,—a sense of eternal afternoon; the waves are warm like soup; and it requires a great mental strain to remember that there is a dusty city called New Orleans where I am wanted. It seems as if two millions of years had passed since I saw New Orleans last; and that I am separated from the real world by a space exceeding the period of a geologic era. And I am so narcotized, that if to-morrow I were to see my grave in New Orleans with my name thereupon, I should not even have strength to doubt the fact that I am dead.

“Work! work!—Here I have loafed for ten whole days,—eating, sleeping, swimming, vaguely wishing for something I don’t know myself,—disturbed only by the advent of the boat every three or four days. The boat vexes me. The great noise assures me that I still live,—that I am not dead, and I am so lazy that I really wish I were dead so as to be even more lazy still.

“But not in the ordinary way, you know! I’d like to melt into the water, and move with it lazily,—tumbling sleepily on the lukewarm sand under big lazy moons;—or become a half-conscious fish to be assimilated by the irresistible stomach of a man-of-war bird. To become a part of the infinite laziness of a man-of-war bird would delight me. Still better to become a cloud floating in the Eternal Blue Ghost and only draw my breath at long, long intervals, so enormously lazy have I been. Therefore I must find force to flee. I shall flee early to-morrow before the sun rises. I think it is the sun that makes me so lazy—In the shade of New Orleans I shall find energy again.

“Affectionately,

“L. HEARN.”

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

Hearn had, by this time, not only become acquainted with all the local intelligentsia, but, in addition, his fame had spread so far that visiting literary lions always asked to meet him. Richard Watson Gilder, of the *Century*, was no exception to this rule, and at their meeting he impressed Hearn as "a handsome and kindly man." Later, when Charles Dudley Warner arrived, he struck up quite an intimacy with Hearn. One night Warner called on him at his lodgings on the corner of Gasquet and Robertson and found Dr. Matas already there, and they had a delightful evening. Hearn, flattered by Warner's keen appreciation, went to his chests in the other room and brought out all his book treasures. Spreading them on the bed, the chill depression of the bare, forbidding room vanished in a glow of cheerful colour shed by the lovely exotic bindings. Touching the books, looking at title-pages, feeling the soft, smooth texture of the leather under his hand, Warner stayed half the night listening to Hearn's brilliant, fascinating talk—always literary and beautiful, but sometimes with a tendency toward classical pornography.

The next day Hearn saw Mrs. Marion Baker and, commenting on Warner's large, wide-open, blue eyes, he said, sceptically, "Do you think anybody in the world could be as candid as Warner looks?"

Warner harboured no doubts as to Hearn's talents. After that evening he waxed most enthusiastic, and in every house he visited he sang Hearn's praises lavishly—said the people of New Orleans did not realize what a genius they had in their midst.

Reports of these praises got back to Hearn and he overcame his first suspicions and wrote Krehbiel: "Charles Dudley Warner, whose acquaintance I made

## Straddling Canal Street

here, strikes me as the nicest literary personage I have yet met." It was this liking that made it possible for Warner to trick him into a promise to lunch with him without being told where they were going. Warner had been telling Miss Grace King, who was then just at the beginning of her distinguished literary career, that she should meet Hearn. Desiring to bring this about, but knowing Hearn's shyness, he took an undue advantage. Warner had been in the habit of dropping in to meals at the Kings' two or three times a week, but one day they were surprised to see him fairly push a resisting little man into the house, as soon as the door was opened. It was Lafcadio Hearn. To Miss Grace he seemed small, slovenly and gauche, and he acknowledged Warner's introductions in a thoroughly scared way, half swallowing inaudible monosyllables. All through luncheon he sat looking as if he were suffering acutely and nobody was able to pry a word out of him. In fact he gave the impression of being on the point of making a break for freedom at any moment. When they returned to the library, he melted away without any one realizing it.

Some years afterward Miss King was in New York visiting Mr. Alden, then the editor of *Harper's Magazine*. One evening he said to her, "That must be a very wonderful parlour you have down in New Orleans, Hearn said it was as big as a cathedral and all hung with pictures."

In Hearn's defence it must be said that parlours seemed to have a malignant power to make him perfectly miserable, so much so, in fact, that he once devoted two columns of the *Item* to an effort to adequately reveal his detestation for them as a class and the infinite appre-

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

hension that one in particular had inspired in his breast. Never has there been a more vivid picture of the sufferings of a really diffident man:

“ ‘Please step into the parlour, sir, and take a seat,’ has always been to us the most horrible condemnation to mental suffering that could be inflicted within a short time. We remember an experience of our own in this city some years ago. There was at that time a gentleman residing here whom we wished to see on a matter very important to our own private interests. We visited the house; and the servants of course said, ‘Please step into the parlour, etc.’ We stepped into the parlour. Through the dismal gloaming which filtered in through the shutters left ajar and the dark blinds between curtains as sombre as funeral hangings, we caught a glimpse of a chair, even as a man fallen overboard by night sometimes catches through the gloom the glimpse of a broken spar. After our eyes had become partially accustomed to the light, we beheld what we had beheld in many other dismal parlours, the awfully respectable furniture that is only used on state occasions;—the oil cloth piano cover;—the revolving stool on which the young lady sits to torture the instrument, while miserable young men sit around her torturing their brains what to say when she gets done;—the inevitable spittoon which is never spit into;—the chandelier which has never been lit since it was put up;—the frightful pictures in which we were unhappy enough to recognize attempted copies of something we had seen in the original;—the ‘oil-paintings’ turned out by wholesale to the order of New York speculators;—the villainously featureless clock;—



# THE LITERARY INTELLIGENCER

JUNE 26, 1880.

## THE AMATEUR MUSICIAN.



"Every man his own musician!"

Let the notes discordant swell;  
Strain your throat with vocal efforts,  
Make the cat-gut strings rebel.

With shapes angular and horrent,  
Let your pictured notes arise,  
As when bombs are madly bursting  
In their circuit through the skies.

Shriek! O, genius undeveloped!  
Screech and crack, oh trembling strings!  
Haply she may like the racket—  
That poor angel without wings!—

But, oh do not once imagine,  
When you make that angel weep,  
That your dismal noise is music:  
Others curse you loud and deep;—

Curse you as a fiend from torment,  
Come their tender nerves to shock;  
Curse you as the evil genius  
Of the babies in the block.

A BOLD

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Some of Hearn's illustrated verse from the *Item*. He always had a deadly hatred for amateur musicians.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

the abominable things in delf and plaster of Paris on the mantel-piece;—the card basket in which no cards are ever placed;—the books on the centre table which no human being would care to read. We had no time to wait; we left with an apologetic message. Again we visited that house in a cheerful mood, and departed haunted by seven blue devils. Yea! a third time also we visited that house; and on this last occasion we did not dare to leave an apologetic message—it would have looked too ridiculous. We simply ‘folded our tents like Arabs and silently stole away’—until we got to the next corner. Then we ran, lest somebody might come after us and call us back into that nightmarish room. We never saw that gentleman. Rather than see him at the cost of remaining in such a parlour, we would prefer to give up the ghost without ever seeing him. We must conclude with the heartiest support of the *Telegraph's* suggestion, ‘Cut the parlour’s throat, and give the hide to the children to romp in.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

Below Canal Street Hearn frequented a society as foreign as any in France. Here the descendants of the old Creole families kept their language and their traditions. Many of the men were cultured, extremely well read in the classics, and it was no rare occurrence for them to have been graduated from French universities. They had inherited a pride as extravagant and sensitive as that possessed by any of their Spanish ancestors; their manners were formal and dignified, marked by a most perfect, even if a trifle floriated, courtesy, and the duello was still the only fashion in which gentlemen could settle a dispute. French was the language of their “foyers” and life among them was essen-

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, September 28, 1881, “That Parlor!”

## Straddling Canal Street

tially Latin, but more closely resembled existence among the solid bourgeois of some small town in Southern France rather than the frothy whirl of Paris.

Some remnants of Feudal customs still persisted. A Creole friend of mine told me he distinctly remembers one such ceremony. In the early '80s, his grandfather, then a very old gentleman, summoned all his sons and daughters, grandchildren and collateral relatives to a solemn conclave. When they were all gathered in the salon he brought out the sword which had been part of his usual apparel in his early days and, giving it to his eldest son (the father of my informant), he said: "My son, I give you my sword. It has never been drawn in an unworthy cause, and I know you will keep it as clean as I have done. With it goes an old man's blessing." Then the patriarch, putting his arms around his son's shoulders, kissed him on either cheek and tears stood in the eyes of the whole family.

It was men of this stock who had formed, two years before Hearn arrived, a society for the encouragement of the study of the French language and literature which they called the "Athénée Louisianais" and soon after started under its auspices the publication of a quarterly in French called *Les Comptes Rendue*.

Many of its contributions held such a keen appeal for Hearn that he often praised it in the *Item* and once said: "We must remark that there are few magazines printed in English in this country which contain articles as interesting and as unique as this French periodical."<sup>1</sup>

From these reports he came to realize that the men who wrote for it had known, from childhood, many of the things that interested him. They could speak the

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, September 3, 1880.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

Creole patois (their negro mammies had taught them before they learned English or French), they knew the Creole proverbs and the Creole songs, which he was so anxious to send to his friend Krehbiel, and their ancestors had been the heroes of all the old traditions and tales that clustered round the Vieux Carré. His consistent recognition of their articles, such as his editorial on "Dr. Mercier's Essay on the Creole Patois,"<sup>1</sup> finally brought results and he made acquaintances among them, but not close friendships, they were much too clannish, suspicious and proud for that. Among them complete social recognition was determined at the time of birth—as it was entirely a question of ancestors. However, an incident occurred which brought him into closer touch. This came about in a purely accidental manner.

One afternoon Hearn was poking around in his near-sighted way in Fournier's old book shop on Royal Street, when a young, pretty girl, unmistakably a Creole from her jet black hair and deep brown eyes, passed the shop and, seeing him inside, hesitated, then entered. Going up to him she said: "I know you are Mr. Hearn, I recognized you from your picture in the *Times-Democrat*. I've been reading your articles and admiring them, and I did want to meet you so very much. I want to ask your advice about some writing I am trying to do."

Hearn was captivated by her youth and enthusiasm and intrigued by the acumen of her cascade of questions—questions which she had been saving up for months in the hopes of some such opportunity—so he was kindly and offered helpful advice which gave new fire to her ambitions. Almost without knowing it, they drifted out

<sup>1</sup> *Item*, July 10, 1880.

## Straddling Canal Street

of the shop together, and Hearn only left her when they reached her door.

It was not as strange as it might seem that this young girl was able to match wits with Hearn, for her upbringing had been very different from that of the typical young person of good French family. Her father was a man of excellent education, broad-minded and tolerant and his house was a rendezvous for the best Louisiana French minds of that day. It represented to the Creoles the equivalent of Mrs. Durno's salon and here they talked literature, philosophy and even religion, which was treated in a very tolerant way—a noteworthy feat for a group of Catholics in the early '80s. One of them, Dr. Alfred Mercier, a man of great culture and marked literary powers, even went so far as to attack the celibacy of Catholic priests in a novel which he called "*La Fille du Prêtre.*" As she had always been the constant companion of her father, she was well-fitted to profit by these meetings, which she always attended and, very soon, her father's friends accepted her on a basis of mental equality. Her acquisitive mind broadened and she lost all the mental inhibitions, false modesty and fanatical religious ideas so often found in women of her race and class in those days. In addition she fenced, wrote poetry, played the piano admirably and sang all the old Creole songs. It was no wonder Hearn found excuse for coming back, and that soon the habit of calling was formed.

She discovered that he left immediately if any one else came in. He explained this away by saying that he hated small talk, but she believed his sensitiveness had even more to do with it. So it came to be tacitly understood that on certain afternoons she was at home to him



alone. They always sat on a sofa near the window in the large high-ceilinged drawing room with its handsome old furniture, where the light was good so he could read. Here they talked frankly and openly about things that interested them both. There was little of the verbal sparring and personalities so often inspired by a difference in sex. He spoke of Japanese Art, his literary ambitions and sometimes launched into one of his delightful and erudite monologues. She helped him with his Creole proverbs, made him repeat over and over again some phrase in the soft negro-French patois, until his pronunciation was perfect, or sang Creole songs and then wrote out the music. Once she showed him a golden bangle of curious design and told him that it was a miniature slave whip which her grandfather had given to her grandmother with the words, "This shall be your badge of authority."

He often gave her invaluable literary advice. One of the first things which she submitted to his criticism was a very pretentious poem of the high-flown variety to which the youth of that day was prone. Although able to keep a very serious face while with her, he later laughingly commented to a friend on one of the similes. In describing a wondrous damsel held, in durance vile, in a castle she had compared her imprisonment to that of a worm in a nut.

He must have felt that she improved under his tutelage, for he said, in the *Item*, in an account of a meeting of the "Athénée Louisianais": "Mlle. . . . contributed a very scholarly and charming article on Racine—which evidences upon the young lady's part considerable critical acumen and that sensitiveness to the beautiful which is the mark of an artistic soul."

## Straddling Canal Street

At first Hearn attended the reunions of this group of older men who met at her father's house, but it is not surprising that this did not last long. Their tempers were too hair-triggered and his own peculiarities were too marked. When he began to write Creole proverbs and folklore a feeling arose that he was encroaching on a field that was theirs by right of inheritance. Alcée Fortier publicly criticized Hearn's book, "Gombo Zhèbes," and Hearn retaliated by an article in the *Times-Democrat*<sup>1</sup> challenging certain statements Fortier made in an address he had delivered before some learned society. After that the atmosphere became so hostile that Hearn confined himself to his afternoon calls. Rumours of his many indiscretions were brought to her, but she did not believe them. There had been nothing of the companion of Denny Corcoran in his manner. His behaviour was irreproachable—he was only the well-bred gentleman—the delightful man of letters. Matters were on such a formal basis that when she made a mistake in English she would apologize and he always replied, "You should do me the credit to realize I knew you knew better." It was platonic; Hearn himself said, "I regard you as I would a younger brother." And yet it is possible that a warmer feeling had been born of their intellectual companionship. He was, to say the least, impressionable and she was "all fire and nerves and scintillation; a tropical being in mind and physique," as he once described her in a letter. In any event they quarrelled, about what is uncertain. Hearn had always told his friends that he would never marry an intellectual woman, but whether this had anything to do with it is pure conjecture. It is a fact, how-

<sup>1</sup> "Sketch of the Creole Patois," *Times-Democrat*, October 17, 1886.

ever, that Hearn ceased his visits. Before they parted he told her that when he left she would never hear from him again.

Most poets seek solace in transmuting into verse the sorrows which afflict them, and probably she was no exception, for there appeared, soon after, in *L'Abeille*, a poem in French, called "Solitude," signed by her nom de plume. It was preceded by a Latin quotation, "De Profundis Clamavi" (from the deeps I call), and told how she awaited him, counting each beat of the wing of seconds, asking whether he did not remember the agonized call for help forced from a suffering soul anxious for life. Whether Hearn was the person at whom the poem was aimed, only the author can testify, but the last line makes it seem more than probable, for she said, "Nevertheless, you have not come, following your path, your eyes upon your book." It is safe to say no young lady in New Orleans in the eighties had more than one bookish admirer.

Doubtless Hearn saw this poem, for he read *L'Abeille* assiduously, and possibly it was this that caused him, in the face of his statement that he would never see her again, to attempt a reconciliation. Once they had visited her father's plantation in the Parishes together. The garden behind the house had been very beautiful, but lack of care had permitted the lush tropical luxuriance to conquer and it had become a mass of trees and shrubs inextricably matted together by a tangle of liana-like vines, some as big as a thigh. On Hearn it had had a very melancholy effect, it impressed him as spectral—even sinister—and, when he got back, he told a friend in New Orleans all about it. It was from this garden that he drew his inspiration and wrote

## Straddling Canal Street

to her one of his charming and imaginative letters in which he spoke of her as Medea-like, brewing from strange herbs and simples her potions and charms, in her haunted and sinister garden—a simile even more accurate than appears on the surface, as she had always claimed second sight and been in the habit of telling fortunes. To this letter she made no direct reply, but in *L'Abeille* appeared another poem in French, over her nom de plume, called "Reponse."

Hearn kept his word after that and remained silent, but when he had gone to Japan she published still another poem "Phantomes d'Orient." She carried a copy of it to old Hawkins and asked him to forward it to Hearn. That it reached him, she is certain, for, months afterward, a contribution from him was published in the *Times-Democrat* and in it he made allusion to "Phantoms of the Occident." So ended, in the public press, this strange literary philandering.





## XII: Another Rung

THE time had come for Hearn to move. New Orleans had for seven years supplied the opportunity to practise his daily literary scales and this had perfected his technique. His prose had become "rhythmed," harmonious and assured. It had lost much of the over-ornamentation and unevenness caused by the choice of a phrase merely because it was unusual, which characterized his earliest writing. He had acquired that knowledge of Creole lore and that ability to speak the patois which was to make possible his work in the West Indies. The summer vacations at Grand Isle and Mrs. Courtney's care had given him back his health. He had met some of the most distinguished magazine editors as they had passed through New Orleans, and the Eastern magazines were accepting his articles for publication. For



## Another Rung

the first time he felt some assurance that he could support himself elsewhere.

Certain changes in the *Times-Democrat* were beginning to make him feel apprehensive and he wrote to Krehbiel:<sup>1</sup>

“ . . . I am living in a house built upon sand. The *Times-Democrat* has secretly changed hands—is now, I understand, owned mostly by the Louisiana Lottery Co., and while the editorial force remains in *statu quo*, the whole edifice may be revolutionized before another six months.”

But the deciding factor that really quickened his purpose was the restless urge of wanderlust, always simmering, that had now boiled up to an insupportable degree. He had sent “Chita” to Alden, the veteran editor of *Harper’s*, and his pleasant letter of acceptance stirred him to a feverish activity. His wooden boxes of books were put in storage and a trunk full of papers and the most valuable books were confided to Mrs. Courtney’s care. He said his good-bys to Page Baker, Mrs. Durno, Ernest Crosby and Dr. Matas, fed the final tid-bit to Nanny and stroked her smooth fur for the last time. Denny Corcoran was genuinely sorry to see him leave, and Mrs. Courtney and Ella cried. He comforted them as best he could, promising to write often, but the excitement of an unknown, but rosily imagined, future kept him from any real regrets. On either the first or the second of June, 1887, Hearn left New Orleans, never to return.

He was true to his promise to Mrs. Courtney, however, and immediately upon his arrival wrote her a long

<sup>1</sup> Letter now in the possession of the author.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

letter describing the incidents of his journey and his first impressions of New York.

"438 West 57th St., New York

"June 5th, 1887

"DEAR MRS. COURTNEY—

"I am not at all tired after the long trip, and am pleasantly situated in one one of the most wonderful houses I ever saw. The best dwelling-houses here are towns in themselves. Think of three thousand people living in one building. Some of these buildings, eleven storeys high, and solid as the rock they rest on, cover a whole block. They have about a hundred doors and several thousand windows, and are rented out in floors,—hot and cold water, electric light, bathrooms, kitchens and eight rooms besides to each flat,—elevators, stairways of iron and fire escapes, electric bells and telephones. In one building the very highest storey rents for about 80 dollars a month. Only rich people can afford to live in such a place. The houses I speak of are near Central Park, and they seem to be trying to grow into the Moon. When I went out on the gallery of one this morning, it made me dizzy to look down. Everything is silent as death at night.

"It is much colder here than in New Orleans; the air is quite different; the sky is not so blue, and looks further away; the colours are not so bright; and the horizon looks foggy. In winter it must be awfully cold. Now, the air seems to be doing me a world of good.

"Owing to a collision on the Louisville and Nashville R.R. I had to stop half a day at Cincinnati. I saw only my dear old friend, and passed the time with him. The old man was so glad to see me that

## Another Rung

he cried as if his heart would break, and shouted and jumped when I came in.

"Krehbiel met me at the depot in Jersey City. He has a beautiful home, and the dearest sweetest little wife and baby girl you ever saw. The wife has a kind sweet little way of making people comfortable that makes me think of you.

"The Sunday law is kept here; but they allow the barber shops to remain open.

"Newspapermen of good reputation seem to make a lot of money here,—ordinary editors on good papers earning from sixty to seventy-five, and even one hundred dollars a week. But it is not easy to be an ordinary editor in New York.

"I hope you are feeling well and taking every care of yourself. My friend saw Maime's picture and said: 'What a sweet face!' My luggage came all right. I will be here for at least a week longer, and will write again soon. This is a letter written in a hurry, and at night.

"God's love to you; remember me to friends, especially McIntyre & Colbert.

"Yours with very best regards

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

It seemed heartless that Hearn did not think it worth while to plan a stop over to see the old printer, Mr. Watkins, who had done so much for him in those early Cincinnati days of hardship. However the old gentleman evidently did not enjoy the visit any the less because he owed it merely to the accident of a railroad collision.

Krehbiel took Hearn with him to his apartment near the park at 438 West 57th St. and would not listen to mention of a hotel while Mrs. Krehbiel most charmingly reinforced her husband's hospitality. There was

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

much talk, raking up of old tales of Cincinnati experiences—questions from Hearn about all his old friends—discussions of Creole folk-songs, and, after Mrs. Krehbiel had gone to bed, much salacious description, delightfully told, of certain aspects of New Orleans life. Questions rained as to Krehbiel's doings and prospects and the size of his salary as musical critic of the *Tribune*. They discussed Hearn's future, and he told his friend that Alden had agreed to publish "Chita" in *Harper's Magazine* and promised to bring it out in book form if it was a success. They sat up until early in the morning.

The next few days exhausted Hearn's pleasure in New York. He found it was most difficult for him to move about, as the ceaseless swarming crowds, continuous clangour and overpowering immensity of the city confused him, and his semi-blindness made traffic a real menace. He did, however, get to see Joe Tunison, whom he had known intimately in their reportorial days in Cincinnati, and, after much travail, he managed to get to Miss Bessie Bisland's apartment, only to find she had moved. He tried once more, going to the new address, and saw her—a visit which caused a complete revolution of his opinions of her.

Having nowhere to go, the itch for work overcame him and he wrote Harper's asking them to forward his MS. in order that he might further refine it. When it came, Krehbiel gave up his own comfortable study to Hearn and retired to the dining-room to write his musical critiques. This was very difficult, for no sooner did he become immersed in his own work than Hearn would bob in holding a sheet of MS. in his hand. Reading a sentence, he'd say, "Are there any changes that would

## Another Rung

improve it? Does it sound right? I want your musical ear to tell me." Krehbiel had hardly time to answer before he had ducked back once more into the study where he'd stay possibly half an hour longer before he'd be back again, reading the same unaltered sentence. It is certain that the quality of Krehbiel's contributions to the *Tribune* must have suffered wofully during Hearn's stay.

Nor was the visit an unmitigated joy to Mrs. Krehbiel. Hearn frightened her with his wild way of abusing those whom he disliked, and some of the opinions she overheard were not such as to cause any happily married woman to pick him as a boon companion for her husband, and, even worse, he smoked in bed and burned holes in her best sheets. Only the tiny daughter of the house was absolutely happy. With her he was always gentle and held her entranced for hours while he told her about Greek heroes or the loquacious animals of Creole folklore—the same tales that had made little Ella adore him in New Orleans.

He tried to get away from the cramped feeling that working in an apartment in a great city gave him by taking a trip to Coney Island for a swim, but, accustomed as he was to the tepid waters of the Gulf, the Atlantic Ocean "felt like an Arctic sea." He and Krehbiel took a walking trip up the Hudson one Sunday, but that proved equally barren of pleasure.

During the course of their rambles Hearn asked, at least a dozen times, whether Krehbiel thought there was a physical dissimilarity between the vocal cords of negroes and white people, else how could the different quality of voice between the races be accounted for? Krehbiel became bored by this repetition and put an end



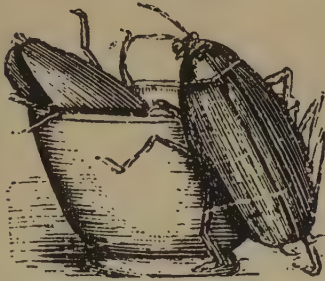
## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

to it by saying, "Well, you're never going to find out because you're never going to get a negro to let you cut his throat to see." Hearn was huffed and stayed so until late in the afternoon when a storm came up and it began to thunder and lightning. At the first clap, he went absolutely to pieces and clung to Krehbiel like a frantic child, weeping from fear, his irritation forgotten in the stronger emotion.

He celebrated his birthday on June 27th by drinking champagne, but this did not bring him very much enjoyment because "Ghosts of dead birthdays trooped in,—looking glum. The bright-faced ones must be off in the future somewhere."

His stay at the apartment dragged on, but this orderly and virtuous life and this inability to move freely about began to weigh on him. Visions of the tropics haunted him, and he was crazy to go to the West Indies. He discussed ways and means with Krehbiel, who suggested that, as Alden liked "Chita," some arrangement might be made with him to send him to the Antilles to write. Hearn liked the idea, but said he had never met Mr. Alden—would never have sufficient courage to break through the ring of steel that surrounded a great editor. Krehbiel, who knew Alden, promised to engineer an interview. The appointment made, Krehbiel arranged with Hearn to meet him at one o'clock at the *Tribune* Building, go out to lunch and, afterwards, call on Alden. Unfortunately, he was fifteen minutes late and found Hearn fuming in a terrible rage. He accused Krehbiel of spoiling his chances of seeing Alden, in fact of wrecking his whole future; he refused to have any lunch and insisted upon going immediately to Harper Bros. He was like a cinder—scorching and unstable. Kreh-

## THE FESTIVE



He maketh ghostly noises in the dead waste and middle of the night.

He hath a passion for the green and crimson of beautifully bound books, and after he has passed over them they look as if they had been sprinkled with a shower of vitriol.

He loveth to commit suicide by drowning himself in bowls of cream or stifling himself in other eatables or drinkables.

When trod upon he explodeth with a great noise.

In this semi-tropical climate he sometimes attaineth to the dimensions of a No. 12 shoe.

He hannteth printing offices, and fatteneth upon the contents of the editor's paste-pot, and upon the bindings of newspaper files.

He haunteth kitchens and occasionally getteth himself baked and boiled.

Five hundred thousand means have been invented for his destruction; but none availeth.

If a house be burnt down to the ground he will momentarily disappear; but when the house is rebuilt, he cometh back again.

His virtues are these: He amneth young kittens, who practice mouse-hunting with him. Also is the deadly enemy of the *cimex lectularius*. He is used for medicinal purposes.

But none care to recognize his good qualities, because of his mischievous and disgusting propensities, and all creatures wage unrelenting war against him, and nevertheless he continueth to propagate his species and to drown himself in cream.

One of Hearn's illustrated articles from the *Item*. It will be noticed that he antedated Don Marquis some forty years in the matter of featuring cockroaches in the public press.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

biel always treated him as though he were a spoiled child when he was in this mood, so he said firmly, "Shut up! We're not going until the appointed time and we *are* going to have lunch first." Hearn calmed down at once, but nursed a grudge all through the meal, hardly saying a word. When they finally arrived, Alden was most gracious, and Krehbiel, thinking it best to leave them alone, walked out of the room and sat down on a bench outside. He waited a half an hour. At the end of the half hour Hearn came out. Krehbiel said, "Well, it's so late we'll go on home to dinner." But Hearn never said a word until they got out on the street and then, as Krehbiel described it, "He grabbed my arm and, holding on, he looked up into my eyes, dancing around me up the street like a small but happy puppy, saying over and over again, 'Wasn't I mean? Can you ever forgive me? But it's all fixed—all fixed and I'm going.'"

What were the exact financial arrangements arrived at are in doubt, but, in any event, Alden had encouraged him to go to the West Indies to write some travel articles. Necessary preparations were few. Hearn was travelling light—in fact the only things he owned in the world of any bulk were his books and those were in New Orleans. His other possessions could be pushed into a travelling bag at a moment's notice. Some time during the first half of July he took steamer. One pair of shoes—a fatal pair—he left at Krehbiel's, who must have breathed a sigh of relief, although he was always too loyal to admit it. Only once did Hearn write to him during this trip, a letter from St. Pierre, Martinique, enclosing a Creole song, but the small daughter of the household received a wonderful doll, dressed in the pic-

## Another Rung

turesque costume of the island métisse—complete even to the gold-hooped earrings.

He wrote a nice letter to Mrs. Courtney, saying:

“Georgetown, Demerara

“DEAR MRS. COURTNEY,—

“So far my trip has been one round of pleasure and surprise; and I expect it will be worth more to me than ten times the money it costs. This city is terribly hot, and not healthy: it is the rainy season,—but we leave to-morrow for Trinidad, which is farther North. We shall not stop there long. I am going to stay a month or two at Martinique. The chief town is St. Pierre. We stopped there on the way to Demerara; and I had good chance to make arrangements, and to see the town. I think it is the prettiest little town in the world. It is on the side of a hill covered with palm trees, orange trees, mahogany trees, and all sorts of queer and monstrous trees. You must imagine the old French quarter of New Orleans,—only much more old-fashioned looking, with narrow streets painted yellow, and all up and down hill. The same courts and two-story cottages, with dormer-windows; and the same Creole talk. It is very beautiful. I can live up in the mountains, if I want, for about \$25 a month; but there are too many snakes there at this time of the year.

“I never get sea-sick, you know; and enjoyed the travel. I don’t find the heat weakening, except in the sun, which shines straight down here.

“This is a poor letter; but the best I can do in hurry of travel. I trust it will find you all well, and happy. I shall be able to write better when I settle down in Martinique.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

"Love to all, & always believe me, your best friend

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

The full account of his flaming enthusiasm he sent in a letter <sup>1</sup> to Dr. Matas, in which he wrote, "I have come to the startling conclusion that civilization is a cold and vapid humbug;—the Tropics are the only living part of this dying planet. Seems to me when I first saw them, that I had seen them before; I know I shall see them again,—think I shall spend a good deal of my life in them,—if it lasts. This is altogether divine."

The full chronicle of this journey, however, is to be found in "A Midsummer Trip to the Tropics," <sup>2</sup> and yet, not quite all, for he wrote much more to a friend than could ever have been printed in any magazine—of the "appetizing" golden bodies of the Martinique quadroons, sensuous but childlike.

. . . . .  
In the early part of September, 1887, the *S.S. Barracouta* landed him safely in New York once more. This time he did not go to the Krehbiels, but put up at the United States Hotel on the corner of Fulton, Water and Pearl streets, probably because it was recommended by some ship's officer.

New York had its usual effect upon him. For years he had been accustomed to a facile, untrammelled, leisurely existence, first in New Orleans and then in the real tropics, living, for the most part (except for a small group of intellectual friends) among simple, naïf people, immeasurably his mental inferiors. He always

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Dr. Matas, July, 1887. 1st. Martinique Trip.

<sup>2</sup> *Harper's Magazine*, July-September, 1888, republished in "Two Years in the French West Indies."



## Another Rung

sought such companions—they rested his brain—made no demands and supplied the opportunity for his amorous adventures. Knowing well, by bitter experience, his own inability to cope with modern life—its complexity exasperated and irritated him to a point that nearly approached the dividing line between normality and abnormality. The mere uproar and immensity of the city confused him to an unbelievable degree, and it was through all this tumult that he made what he thought was a frightful journey to Krehbiel's apartment, with silver rings from the Antilles jingling in his pockets for the little daughter. After all this troublesome trip, he arrived only to face the disappointment of finding the Krehbiels out of the city. Then, starved for the companionship of an old friend, he tried to find Joseph Tunison. When he ended in a police court he gave up, discouraged, and determined then and there that he was going back to the West Indies as soon as the *Barracouta* started on her return trip. This decision was in no way surprising, for it conformed absolutely with his general line of conduct. Whenever conditions became hard and disagreeable, he never stayed and faced them, he simply ran away. Who knows but that some other bond—some poignant secret memory of a lithe, gold-amber body was not also dragging at his desires and stealthily confirming his intention to return, for he wrote to Dr. Matas:<sup>1</sup> “. . . The tropical nature with all its memories haunts me perpetually,—draws my thoughts back over the azure sea and under the turquoise sky to the great palms and the volcanic hills and the beautiful brown women.”

With the idea of returning to the West Indies firmly

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Dr. Matas. Concerning Lafcadio Hearn by Gould. P. 95.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

in his mind, Hearn made his slow, laborious way to Harper's to call on Mr. Alden. That generous gentleman's pity was aroused by Hearn's evident helplessness and discouragement, and he invited him to be his guest, for a few days, at his home in Metuchen, N. J. Here Hearn thoroughly enjoyed himself. He became great friends with little Annie Alden and spent hours watching her paint in the garden or wandered with her along country roads, taking the keenest joy in the golden-rod, the sky-blue chicory, and all the other simple, lovely, wild flowers that never grew in the tropics. Indeed, Miss Alden made a very deep impression on his lonely heart, and he wrote Dr. Matas: "Alden is a direct descendant of Longfellow's Miles Standish, and his daughter is the sweetest Priscilla a painter ever dreamed of or a poet sung of."

One day she took him out driving, and, as always, he was careful to sit with the good side of his face toward her. As they went along she told him a story, involving a man with a blind eye and it was not until she finished that she realized his affliction and started to apologize. But Hearn stopped her immediately, saying: "Don't say a word! On the contrary, I should really thank you, for you are the only person in America who has ever forgotten it." As a measure of his self-consciousness, his reply was most informing.

The afternoon teas at the Alden's caused him just as much suffering as his companionship with Miss Annie afforded him pleasure. He attended under protest and always waited until the crowd had arrived and then he was to be seen, quietly slipping in, skirting the room close to the wall, like some excessively timid rodent. The quiet evenings spent alone with the family came

## Another Rung

as a wonderful boon after the torture of one of these afternoons, and for years he remembered vividly, sitting before a roaring wood fire, smoking a cigar, as he listened to the mellow voice of Mr. Alden reading a passage from a book he felt held some pleasure or profit for his guest.

It was during this visit that Hearn arranged with Mr. Alden to take care of his books for him, and when he returned to New York, at the end of his stay, he wired Mrs. Courtney, on Sept. 26th: "Send on trunk books by express to United States Hotel, New York, C.O.D."; and wrote Dr. Matas to arrange to have the boxes which were in storage shipped to Mr. Alden.

While there is no doubt that Alden encouraged Hearn to take the second trip to the West Indies, it is perfectly certain that he went without making any formal arrangement with *Harper's* for, in a letter to Dr. Gould, written soon after he had arrived in Martinique, he said: ". . . Suddenly made up my mind to go back to the tropics by the same steamer that had brought me. I had no commission, resolved to trust to magazine work."

Before he left New York he wrote Miss Bisland that he regretted the hurry of departure would not permit him to see her before leaving for the tropics, perhaps never to return. The Krehbiels he did not see at all. But even in the rush of buying his small, necessary outfit and the camera that was later to plague him so, he did not forget to write a nice pleasant letter to his old landlady in New Orleans.

"DEAR MRS. COURTNEY:

"I am sailing Saturday morning early, Oct. 1st, for West Indies; and shall be absent all the winter

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

at least,—for I shall have much work to do. Up to this writing,—early Friday,—I have not heard from you: but a friend here will look after whatever comes for me when I am gone away. I hope you did not pay any expressage on trunk: it would only delay its coming, and it would pain me to know you had gone to the least expense. However you know this so well, that I don't think you will do it.

“New York is an awful place in the business quarter: the only manner I can find my way about is by getting a hack. Railroads are roaring overhead all the time; the streets are blocked with wagons, horses, vehicles of a thousand kinds,—and the cram and jam on Broadway cars is something terrific. Then it takes you all morning to get to a place, and all the afternoon to get back. I walked twenty minutes as hard as I could through the Post Office building,—just to find the place to post a letter. You can have some idea of the size of buildings here when I tell you that the rent of one of them is more than a million dollars a year. Rents of half-a-million and \$700,000 are more common. The place deafens me, stifles me, frightens me; I am glad to get out of it into a nice warm sleepy old-fashioned place. I am going to send you photographs of where I shall be. My address will be c/o American Consul, St. Pierre, Martinique.

“When I got back to New York, I found all my friends out of town, and could not find anything;—luckily I met all unexpectedly in the evening, an invitation to go into the country. I went there, and was able to rest while my business affairs were being settled up in New York. Since then, however, I have been all the time on a crazy rush here and there, trying to find something or somebody;

## Another Rung

and it takes me about two days to find anything here.

“Well, I trust to see you all on my return,—which I shall try to make by way of *New Orleans*. This time I did not take a round-trip ticket,—so that I will be able to get back by way of Havana and Florida. You will hear from me soon again,—in about eighteen or twenty days from this writing.

“Love to all, and most to yourself, and believe me always,

“Sincerely your little friend

“LAFCADIO HEARN.

“P.S.—Only one letter reached me from you,—the stamp had been lost in the Post Office and delayed.”







### XIII: West Indies Once More

ON the 2nd of October, 1887, the *S.S. Barracouta* left pier 49, East River, bound for Martinique with Hearn aboard. New York had only known him for three weeks.

The peaceful life on shipboard was grateful after the turmoil of the city and the officers were old friends. One occurrence on the way down, however, almost deprived the world of his West Indian and Japanese books. Feeling his half-blind way around the ship, he did not notice a hatch that had been opened for ventilation. Stumbling in, he dropped to the bottom of the hold. Many a man has had his neck broken by such a fall, but he was fortunate and escaped with only a fright.

When he landed at St. Pierre, Martinique, once more he slipped back into the easy habit of tropical life with the same feeling of relief that a tired body fits into the hollows of an accustomed chair.

## West Indies Once More

"Cyrillia," his "bonne," who had taken the place of the faithful Louise Roche, the coloured woman who kept his rooms and sang him voodoo songs in New Orleans, woke him each morning at five, a tiny cup of strong fragrant coffee and a plate of brilliant tropical fruits in her hands.

Then followed a gorgeous swim in water almost the temperature of the body along a beach fringed with the nodding plumes of giant palms seen against a background of misty mountains rising in their covering of tropical foliage.

In an hour he was back at his desk, nose close to canary-yellow paper, writing until lunch-time, breakfast, as it was called in the French manner, a delightful meal—vegetables, smooth mangoes with the clean aromatic taste of dilute turpentine, sapodillas, corosols and sometimes as a delicacy *titin*, a tiny fish resembling whitebait.

After that the heat became so scorching that clothes were unbearable so, slipping into pyjamas, he followed the custom of the country and loafed through the afternoon in perspiring drowsiness, mental effort being impossible after two-thirty P. M. Supper at seven and bed at nine completed his usual routine.

He met M. A. Testart, a New Orleans Creole, who had migrated to Martinique, and a notary, M. Leopold Arnoux, who always remained his loyal friend. Through them he made acquaintances among the white Creoles and came to know their *vie d'interieure*. Especially did he pity the Creole ladies, condemned to a life of perfect intellectual vacuity, with nothing to do but read books of piety in enormous dimmed rooms. They were charming to look at, but their ingenuousness of

## MOSQUITOES!!



The mosquito is the most cunning of all living things which fly. She sees by night even better than by day. She knows by heart all the holes in every mosquito curtain in the largest hotels. She is a first class judge of dry goods, and distinguishes afar off the quality and thickness of socks and stockings. She poketh her little bill through the finest material that modern machinery can spin.

We say "she" because our tormentors are females; the male mosquitoes are respectable, well behaved boys who remain where they are born. Only feminine malice can explain the ingenious capacity for torment possessed by the mosquito which plays vampire both by night and by day.

When a mosquito lights softly with a subdued scream of triumph on the end of your nose, or any other end, she always keeps one leg hoisted high in air, so as to be ready to flee at a moment's notice. It is only when she puts that leg down that you have any chance of end-

ing her pernicious existence.

Another matter in which biting mosquitoes show their feminine characteristics is their dislike of tobacco.

But they also possess feminine patience, and will wait hours for a smoker to finish his pipe. Then they will take ample revenge.

Nevertheless mosquitoes have their uses.

If it were not for mosquitoes we should all become terribly lazy in this climate. We should waste our time snoring upon sofas or falling in easy chairs, or gossiping about trivial things, or dream-

ing vain dreams, or longing after things which belong to our neighbours, or feeling dissatisfied with our lot, instead of humping ourselves and scooting around and making money. Idleness is the mother of all vices; and mosquitoes know this as well as anybody, and not being lazy themselves they will not suffer us to be lazy.

It is for this reason that they hum around only in summer when everything is lazy and drowsy,—especially on one of those quiet summer days when everything is so silent that one can hear the cocks crowing to each other at long distances, and answering each other like sentries in the old cities of Spanish-America. For in winter time the cold forces us to make ourselves useful as well as ornamental.

And so, even while we curse, let us also bless the mosquitoes, for making us move about and root around, instead of dreaming our lives away.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of Hearn's illustrated skins from the *Trem*.

## West Indies Once More

mind amazed him, and he always quoted with joy the remark of one young woman who had said, quite seriously before a number of people, that it was ridiculous for any one to try to explain the cause of earthquakes, because the Chinese, who were the greatest scholars in the world, had never been able to account for them.

Sometimes the enervating effect of the climate interfered with his usual morning industry and robbed him of every impulse to write. Those days he spent in wanderings—the kind he had loved in New Orleans.

At times he drifted down to the river and gossiped with the washerwomen, unconsciously noting in his wonderful memory every inflection of their soft slurring talk, analyzing for future use every movement of their work with as much precision as an efficiency expert. He watched the *porteuses* on their way to the markets in the early morning, huge baskets of fruit and vegetables balanced on their heads, their skirts tucked into a belt in front, showing the shapely muscled bronze of their legs, as they walked with all the lithe feline grace of some wild animal.

Knowing the Creole patois of Louisiana, he soon learned that of Martinique and could speak to these women in the only idiom they knew. Sometimes he tried to take their pictures with the camera he had brought with him from New York. But the *porteuses*, although they did a man's work, had a woman's vanity and refused unless they went home to put on their Sunday clothes. This of course defeated his end and his successful pictures were pitifully few, as his near-sighted handling of a camera, whose mechanism was always something of a mystery to him, was seldom quick enough to catch them unawares.



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

But he was more successful when he did not have to work so fast and there were days when he fussed for hours over the various adjustments of his "detective camera," as he so proudly described it, trying to get pictures of the graceful golden bodies of nude quadroom girls as they posed in the cool purple shadows of some high-ceilinged room, giggling bashfully and gurgling soft "Gombo" French.

The obtaining of illustrations however became an especially troublesome business when he attempted to get photographs of the *'ti canotiers* who paddled out to the incoming steamers in frail little home-made tubs to dive for coins.

"Nothing proved so difficult to take as the little boys in their canoes. I engaged two photographers, and had six attempts made in vain;—something was always wrong. But the crowds, and the boys!! How they jostled and yelled and clamoured for the ten cents apiece that I promised them. Each time the effort was made the crowd was thicker and the boys were noisier; and at last the affair came to a climax.

"There were 17 *canotiers* that day; and I could not tell which was which,—for when I went to pay off, every little brown, black and yellow boy in the neighbourhood took all his clothes off, and joined in,—so that it seemed as if I had a hundred boys to pay off.

"Then I got the 17 in a line, surrounded by a shrieking mob. I paid at one end, and as fast as I did so, the recipients ran to the other end of the line,—so as to make the paying eternal and incomprehensible. I ran away!



## West Indies Once More

“And all the horrid little naked boys ran after me. I took refuge in the fourth storey of the tallest building in St. Pierre—the house of the photographer De Paz, and a mob collected before the door. I saw 25 in the mustering, all of whom said they had not been paid—though I had already paid off 13 out of the 17. They made an attack a *là main armée*, as it were, charging up the staircase; and the police had to be sent for so that I could leave the building. Then everybody began to cry; and I felt quite sorry—but what else could I do? In the afternoon all financial troubles were adjusted, and order prevailed.”<sup>1</sup>

Other annoyances blocked his path. A particular jinx seemed to hinder his efforts at collecting the music of Creole songs. Being no musician he had to rely on the help of others, and the first man with whom he made arrangements left for France before the work even started; the second, organist of the cathedral and a wonderful musician, died of typhoid fever, and the third, a coloured musician, caught the fever too.

Homesickness attacked Hearn and he wrote to Miss Alden.

“But occasionally one feels as though in exile, and you get tired of the eternal palms against the light, tired of the colours, tired of the shrieking tongue spoken around you, tired of hearing by night the mandibles of the great tropical insects furiously devouring the few English books upon the table.”

<sup>1</sup> From a letter to Miss Annie Alden, written about November, 1887.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

To her father he offered to send a stuffed snake as soon as the quarantine was lifted—thought it would look well in the parlour at Metuchen.

But these fits of loneliness never lasted long. There were too many compensations—the gorgeous colouring, the quaint picturesque peacefulness of Martinique, and the, for him, constant lure of the “wasp-coloured” flesh of the lovely *femmes de couleur* dressed in clothes gay and harmonious as any spectrum. Nor were books, though scarce, entirely lacking. He had met the distinguished doctor and writer of the Antilles, Dr. J. J. J. Cornilliac, and that charming open-hearted but eccentric old gentleman permitted him to rummage through his library, easily the richest on the island in Martinique and West Indian items. All the volumes were rare, many worm eaten and some were as old as two hundred years. To top his generosity Dr. Cornilliac permitted him to borrow just as many as he liked—a wonderful boon in a place where there were no booksellers.

Everything had gone merrily for Hearn since his return, until a really serious disappointment overtook him. Mr. Alden refused to accept for publication in Harper's a little novelette over which he had spent much time and care. It was called “Lys” and recounted the sensations and reactions of a daughter of the tropics condemned to leave her native land and live in the North. His first idea was to have Lys die of consumption and with this in view he wrote to his dear friend, Dr. Matas, asking to be sent a list of some “more poetical and agonizing pathological facts of death from consumption,—mental and physical: spasms and pains.” But he changed his mind later and finally finished it in a way he felt was much more artistic, “treat-

NO. 354.

## POLICE BOARD.

THE USUAL NUMBER OF CASES OF  
NEGLECT OF DUTY.

How Patrolmen Slumber on Their Beats  
While the Lives and Property  
of the Community are  
in Danger.



Murder and Robbery walk the street,  
Armed with the weapons of deadly strife;  
While the mild policeman sleeps on his beat,  
Caring for naught save his precious life,  
See how the weird procession moves;  
All unopposed to its bloody goal;  
While the sleeping Peeler calmly proves  
How much he values his little soul.

The Board of Police Commissioners  
met last night, his honor, Mayor Patton,

One of Hearn's illustrated editorials in verse which appeared in the  
*Item*.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

ing only the ghostly, not the physical side of death which is more revolting." When completed *Lys* consisted of 170 pages of minutely written MS.

As a sequel, he had even planned a companion piece, a sort of pendant to "*Lys*" which was to be named "*Nini*" and was to depict the progressive infatuation and mastery which the tropics exercise over Northern natures. But of course the rejection of "*Lys*" killed "*Nini*" which was particularly unfortunate as *Nini* would have undoubtedly been autobiographical—a detailed diary of Hearn's own spiritual capitulation to the tropics.

The MS. of "*Lys*" came back bringing its burden of disappointment, and it was pathetic to see, in Hearn's letters, the self-abasement with which he accepted Alden's criticism of "my abominable *Lys*," and the excuses he made for it on the ground of the first unbalancing effect of the tropics upon an imagination unaccustomed to its stimulation.

Three years later, after many major operations "*Lys*" appeared as the final sketch in "*Two Years in the French West Indies*." But it had been so emasculated, so deleted, in the effort to force it past the strict censorship imposed by the puritanical literary hierarchy of the 1890's, that it was quite unrecognizable—a mere anæmic shadow of its former self.

There is a difference between constructive criticism, the result of which is to improve the art content of a literary work, and restrictive criticism, whose sole object is to restrict such a work into a form agreeable to the ephemeral standards of a literary cult. The tendency of the latter is to sterilize genius into mere innoxiousness, and, although Mr. Alden was undoubtedly

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actuated by only the most kindly, generous and helpful of motives, it is to be feared that his criticism may have, unwittingly, come under the latter classification. But he was helpless to prevent this for, though broadminded himself, he was necessarily bound by the narrow, collective prejudices of the typical "Subscription List" of that period.

In any event, the rejection of "Lys" worked great hardship because Hearn produced so slowly that he could only make a bare living if EVERYTHING was paid for, so that a rejection threw him into hopeless debt. He had landed on the island in November with only \$300 in his pocket, all that remained after he had paid for his passage, his camera (which had cost him \$106) and his other necessary purchases before leaving New York.

This had all been spent for, in the early part of February, he wrote Alden setting out in detail his financial flatness and asking that the sketches he had forwarded be promptly paid for. Hearn was living on credit—a support so tenuous in his case that he expected it to crumble any instant. But as if this was not enough, a new misfortune overtook him.

In February a triple epidemic swept the island—small-pox, typhoid, and *fièvre palu de'enne*, as the Creoles called it. The coloured people died like flies, many Europeans were stricken and matters went particularly badly for an opera company that arrived from France just a day before a stringent quarantine was declared, preventing their escape. Doomed to remain, and being forced to earn their living, they gave operas each night. Many in the stricken city attended and Hearn was very much affected to notice that at almost



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every performance some face among the actors had disappeared—a victim to the fever.

Later, Hearn himself caught a fever—"one of those slow, cold, painful fevers which laugh at quinine." He was seriously ill for six weeks, nursed and kept alive through the charity of a kind-hearted landlady and any reader curious about the detail of his sufferings may find a faithful catalogue of every pain, every mental depression, every symptom that he underwent, carefully chronicled in "*Pa combiné che!*"<sup>1</sup>

When he recovered he was even more destitute than before, if such a thing could be possible. ". . . I had to live for a long time upon the charity of coloured people," he wrote Baker years afterward; "until I made friends among the upper classes. They pulled me through with true Creole generosity;—one friend advancing me some 600 francs." This "rare friend" was the notary, M. Leopold Arnoux, who had lent him this sum when no one else would have trusted him "even for a cigar," as Hearn said. This happened when Hearn's landlady, at her patience's end, was about to evict him and seize his effects for non-payment of rent. It was undoubtedly his appreciation of this timely assistance that moved Hearn to dedicate to Arnoux his "*Two Years in the French West Indies.*"

Hearn's affairs did not improve for, in the middle of July, he wrote Alden another letter in which he said he had only managed to earn \$100 in the last 10 months; that he had never "been able to make up for the loss of time and money involved by my first failure;" and that ever since he had "had to struggle with sickness, humiliation of all sorts." The letter ended with a plea that he

<sup>1</sup> "*Two Years in the French West Indies.*"

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be given any work he was capable of doing, even if it only be translating.

Evidently Hearn received a most encouraging letter for, in an answer of August 8, 1888, to "Dear friend Alden," he says, "the effect of hearing from you made me dizzy for a short while, because I was too glad." It is more than likely that Alden enclosed a draft in this letter, either as loan or payment for some of his sketches. The true facts of his financial transactions with Alden have always been shrouded in mystery, for Mr. Alden always refused to discuss them, however, from indirect evidence, it would seem more than likely that Alden had loaned him money at one time or another. Hearn's library had been left in Alden's care and in a letter written to him soon after Hearn had gotten to the West Indies, Hearn said: "I also send a little document you spoke of,—an olograph<sup>1</sup> that is enough to settle *your claim*<sup>2</sup> to books, in extreme circumstances." What other construction can be placed on this letter than that he made the will in order to secure Alden, in the event of his death, for money owed him? In fact, Hearn seemed quite anxious about it for, in his very next letter, fearing the validity of the will might be doubted, he hastened to explain some of the intricacies of the French law. "The other matter that I forgot was to tell you that the little testament was written on official papier-timbré and dictated by a notary according to French law. As I am not an American citizen it makes no difference:—at all events the O will is equally valued in all countries."

These facts are important, as an acrimonious misun-

<sup>1</sup> Hearn evidently spelled this phonetically after hearing the French pronunciation, which drops the h. He meant holograph.

<sup>2</sup> The italics are the author's.

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derstanding about these books, sprang up at a later date.

But, to return to Hearn's life on the island, the letter from Alden that had made him "dizzy" seemed to mark a turning point in his affairs. His financial troubles seemed to have been settled, and his answering letter bubbled with plans for trips to Honduras, to the Orinoco country, to Mexico—as usual, he was restless. He even mentioned having in mind an idea for a tropical novel, but complained that although he had all the scenic matter, climatic effects, customs and beliefs, he lacked a moral motive and a large idea—possibly a poverty due to a similar lack inherent in himself.

There seemed to be only one fly in his ointment and that was that the length of the journey precluded the possibility of correcting proof on his sketches which were now beginning to appear in *Harper's*. So much concern did this give him that he wrote voluminous and curious letters to Mr. Alden on the subject. In one of them he said:

"Proofreading to me means more than rewriting; it is the finish, the polish, the correction of all faults that cannot be judged in MS. MS. is colourless and vague. Print is positive and critical by itself. . . ."

"It is a proof-correction in which the writer is best able to assert his individuality;—"

"There is more difference in the appearance of an article printed without being seen by me, and one retouched, than between a first and fourth writing of a MS. text."

"I cannot finish it in MS., even by rewriting every page six times. Something is wanting,—pro-

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portion, restraint, colour,—the visible maintenance of a purpose in the choice of words.”

Finally as a climax he said if he were offered \$5000 for a book on condition that he did not read proofs, or the mere publication of it without gain if he read proofs, he would not hesitate a second to forgo the \$5000.

But the impossibility of proofreading rankled in his mind, destroyed his rest and embittered his life to such an extent that he could control his resentment no longer, and it overflowed in another letter to Mr. Alden—a passionate plea for the right of an author to use every means to attain artistic perfection (as he sees it) for his brain-children.

“I feel that I cannot any longer endure the pain of seeing myself in print as somebody else. The whole ‘style’ of the composing room,—the changes,—the changes by omission and punctuation and reparagraphing and condensation,—destitute me of all personality to an extent that discourages me utterly. No kindness and no money can help me to bear the torture of it. Assurance of personality is the one necessary stimulus to the duty of every true artistic striver. It is the consciousness of it that nerves him to suffer anything else, so that he can find voice. Take it away from him, and you kill him! He must resign all further effort to please. Whatever is in him,—with all his faults,—he feels as none other can, because the feeling is his own blood; and a change by omission may be an injury to him quite impossible for the person making the change to divine. What is the use of working only to appear as one is not to a quarter or half a million readers? Those papers—excepting

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'Chita,'—have not been me: they have scarcely been a suggestion. And this, that I suffered for more than you can ever know—since I shall never tell you—is like a block of material only, to be hewn to fit an orifice! Illustrations that contradict the text; text abbreviated and made colourless to form—not a page but a parallelogram of type; and the waiting of a long year to see only this! And I have been working so hard to please you, and to please myself by polishing and coaxing into life another story! Why should I give it to be changed and discoloured and have every drop of soul squeezed out of it? But I am not asking the impossibility of changing the immense machinery that crushes me;—I ask now only freedom,—the right to place my work where it can live, even if it pay me nothing. For if this personality of mine—which in your literary judgment may be far less than I conceive it,—must be sacrificed at each apparition in print, I would wish to take back my promise to send my work always to you."<sup>1</sup>

His feelings relieved by this outburst, he wrote Alden to pay no attention to it and, for the balance of his stay, seems to have gotten along contentedly enough. His material needs were taken care of, except that he was never able to get enough plates for his camera nor canary-coloured paper upon which to write.

He made the trip up Mt. Pelée with an English photographer, to take pictures, and swam in the crater; but the journey was exhausting and he came home feeling he "had been broken on the wheel." Some one told him the story of Youma, an episode of the negro revolt

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Alden.



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of '48 (the main facts of which actually occurred), and it so fascinated him that the book "made itself in about three months."

He continued to collect bits of folklore and local colour, mixing with the multi-coloured population, making humble friends among *les femmes de couleur*,—all the while studying them minutely, because his near-sightedness prevented him from ever taking a large general view of anything. Instead, he was condemned to examine everything bit by bit and this physical necessity seems to have formed his mental and literary habit. He was a sort of human microscope fitted with a device to record whatever he saw, detail by detail. The surprise came, however, when after the perusal of this microscopic record, it was suddenly discovered that the sum of this minutiae formed a complete, vivid, perfect picture. And it was this method of observation that Hearn applied to the Islanders. But the simile of the microscope must not be permitted to give the impression that his investigations were conducted in the cold scientific manner of a specimen-collecting botanist. There was no such detachment in his quest. He was an incurable and passionate romanticist, driven by an irresistible desire for emotional satisfaction. Whether these indulgences were for his ultimate good, he never considered. The gorgeous, hot beauty of the tropics, the lazy, simple, easy life, disrupted by moments of lust as vivid and unexpected as lightning on a black night, the lovely exotic women of colour, brilliantly plumaged as any tropical birds, naïf and lovable as children, passionate as fire—all this he loved and craved, even though it kill him, and kill him the tropics almost did, when he had the fever. But as he snatched, he never forgot to record.

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And so his stay drew to a close and in the spring of 1889 (about the first of May to be more exact) he, once more, set sail for New York, both his mind and his note-books crammed to overflowing with grist for his literary mill.





#### XIV: Dr. Gould and Mr. Hearn

SPEAKING merely of dissimilarity and excluding all question of moral obloquy, there was as much difference between Dr. Gould and Mr. Hearn as lay between "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," and yet, for a time, they were close friends.

It was the Philadelphia oculist who had made the first advances. He wrote Hearn in April, 1887, while he was still in New Orleans, to express great admiration for certain of his translations. Shyness and an *idée fixe* of his physical repulsiveness had always made intellectual companionships confined entirely to letter writing, far easier for Hearn than the give and take of personal intercourse, so, warmed by praise from a person whose letter indicated culture and interest in literature, Hearn plunged into a long and voluminous correspond-

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ence which soon waxed most intimate. A blank sheet of notepaper always seemed to have the effect of drawing from him his most intimate thoughts—thoughts which the reserve, always engendered in his case by the presence of a stranger, would have kept from expression. Their letters dealt with literature, Gautier in particular, the colour sense, etc., and finally progressed to questions and answers about Hearn's ocular defects—even the journey to the Antilles was not allowed to interrupt the correspondence. Dr. Gould sent him copies of various articles and pamphlets he had written on professional and scientific subjects, such as the effect of reflex neurosis. These so impressed Hearn that he wrote him, "Yours must be a very remarkable mind. . . . In fact, I feel very small when I compare the work of my fancy with the work of such knowledge as yours." They exchanged pictures and personal descriptions, which inspired the Doctor with such confidence that he entrusted to Hearn, by letter, his idea for a medical novel and asked his advice. To Hearn's credit be it said that he was always a fearless critic and that he never let any claims of friendship influence his æsthetic findings. True to his code, he answered flatly, "I don't like your plot for a medical novel at all. It involves ugliness."<sup>1</sup> And then he outlined his idea of what a medical novel should be, and it was the Doctor's turn to be lost in admiring surprise.

In April, just before Hearn was to leave the West Indies forever, he wrote the Doctor and asked if he could find him a quiet room in Philadelphia, where he could work in peace for a few months.

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn," Bisland, Vol. I, p. 437.

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Hearn landed in New York the 8th of May, 1887, and a strange figure he made as he came down the gang-plank into the whirl of the waterfront, his clothes bearing the peculiar impress of a Martinique tailor and, on his head, an enormous tropical hat. People pointed and nudged each other as he passed and doubtless the same thing happened to him which later occurred in Philadelphia—bad little boys formed a cue behind his back, singing, "Where did you get that hat?" to the infinite amusement of the passerby. New York, that "wild cyclone of electricity and iron," unnerved him and he did not stay long enough to see any of his friends with the possible exception of Mr. Alden. To Joseph Tunison he mailed a letter saying that before its receipt he would have disappeared because the city made him crazy and he had no "peace of mind or rest of body" until he got out of it. Then he took the train for Philadelphia and presented himself at Dr. Gould's office.

Human actions arise from so many complexities of motives that it is useless to surmise whether the Doctor was actuated by pity, curiosity about a strange, exotic figure that was just beginning to be heard of in literary circles, a desire to get advice on his own literary enterprises, a feeling of intellectual sympathy, or just plain hospitality. Whatever the reason, Dr. Gould invited Hearn to stay at his house as his guest and Hearn accepted with alacrity. His host was most considerate and arranged a place where he could work, and Hearn began editing his West Indian material and correcting proof of "Chita," soon to be published in book form. But, busy as he was, he did not fail to send Mrs. Courtney a simple, kindly letter.



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"c/o Dr. Geo. M. Gould,  
"119 South Seventeenth St.,  
"Philadelphia.

"DEAR MRS. COURTNEY:—

"You will be shocked that your letter reached me only to-day—June 5th,—after following me from Martinique to Philadelphia, where I am stopping for a while to get through with some literary work.

"I have been back from the West Indies about three weeks. The climate did not pull me down physically; there was some yellow fever, but I felt as well as I ever did in my life. If it was only a question of being well, I could not complain. But in the great heat, I found at last that I could not write, could not think, and would have to change climate for a while. Besides I could get nothing published in good shape while I was so far away, and had to return to get some books out.

"Nothing could give me more pleasure than to hear you had given up the grocery. It would have been too much of a physical strain for anybody to carry it on without help.

"I passed two Good Fridays in Martinique. Your boys were nice to forswear meat because you did not like them to eat it that day: if they had been in Martinique they could not have got one grain of meat on that day for \$10,000. The people there think that to eat meat Good Friday is to have bad luck for the rest of one's life; it is such a sin in their eyes that to mention the word meat on Good Friday makes them scream . . . I am sure all this will make you quite happy, and you will think the Martinique people not so bad, after all.

"I suppose you thought me a very naughty boy

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not to have written oftener. The fact is I had too much worry to write to anybody very often;—there were only certain hours of the day when I could write at all, on account of the heat; and the disinclination to attempt correspondence grows on one more and more every day in such a country,—If one gets through all right, then one has something done to send one's friends: if anything goes amiss,—why better the friends should not know.

“Well I am busy now getting some books out. I am in the house of a very good friend—(I have luck with the *doctors*, like you have),—a physician here, an oculist. If anything happened to my eyes I would be in good hands. I don't know how long I shall stay; but I cannot very well leave the United States before winter, because of my new books that are to be published. I am still thinking about the tropics; but even my friends in Martinique advise me not to go back to any part of the West Indies before a year;—so I will probably go elsewhere,—perhaps to the other side of the world. Don't think I shall ever remain in any one place long; but if I should I would like Philadelphia better than any city I have seen in the U. S. . . . But until I can get all my work done, I don't know just what I will next attempt.

“I am sure that if kind good wishes and prayers could help me in my travelling, yours must have done so. I have seen some rough times in the tropics, but I pulled through first rate and feel more confidence in myself than I used to.

“With affectionate regards to all friends and the best share to yourself, believe me always your friend and grateful little boarder of other days

“LAFCADIO HEARN.”

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Dr. Gould took a very sympathetic interest in Hearn's work and gave him much helpful advice about his health and sight. After many efforts he was able to make Hearn modify his tropical clothes and dress in a manner sufficiently like a Philadelphian to avoid drawing a crowd when he went on the street. Hearn was grateful for all this kindness, and a strong feeling of affection for and confidence in the doctor was manifest. These sentiments burgeoning so luxuriantly in his heart, led him to place the Doctor on a pedestal, to burn the incense of admiration at his feet and to confess to him his innermost secret soul. Then began a very strange campaign—something in the nature of a revival meeting carried on in a dignified and intellectual manner. Dr. Gould was dogmatic, utilitarian and of scientific tendencies while his ideas of morality, a trifle indurated and inexorable, seem to have been a direct inheritance from his Puritan ancestors. These qualities and theories of life were as much opposed to Hearn's as a germicide is to a microbe, and it is just the part of the germicide, a sort of mental antiseptic that the good doctor determined to play for his friend's benefit.

Almost any one else would have realized the futility of trying to convert to chastity a man of forty whose life up to that time had been dominated by two absorbing passions—one an obsession to arrive at perfect beauty of literary style, the other to satisfy an illassible sexual craving. Only age, illness or a happy marriage could have accomplished such a change. It was too much like expecting a rabbit to imitate the austerities of St. Anthony after hearing a lecture on the sin of concupiscence. But some strange complex in Dr. Gould's soul, probably a heritage from a Puritan ancestor, would not permit

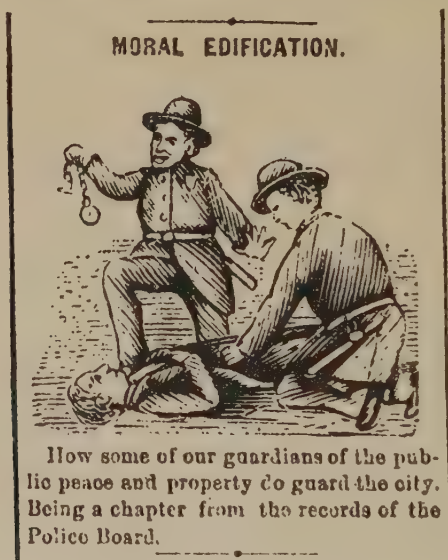
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him to view his attempt to reform Hearn in the light of a hopeless project, and stranger even than this was the fact that Hearn himself was equally obtuse. His was a dependent nature, always seeking for some one on which to lean. In Cincinnati it had been Krehbiel, in New Orleans it was Dr. Matas and Page Baker, and when he had lost these props he turned to Alden, whose kindly criticisms he had humbly received and heeded. Hearn realized that much of his unhappiness and lack of success came from his own peculiarities of character, and yet he always nursed an ever-recurrent hope that each new friend would supply him with a magical cure-all. So when Dr. Gould with his strong personality offered him a panacea for all his ills, a philosophical philter to bring success, Hearn shut his eyes and swallowed the pill with perfect faith. In a curious chapter of his book, called "Getting a Soul,"<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gould says that Hearn told him he had given him a soul, and the doctor continues by explaining in detail how he accomplished this very difficult feat. He first taught his pupil "that human beings are not always, and may never be wholly, the slaves of the senses and the dupes of desire." Belief in this was a good deal to ask of a middle-aged man who had, instead of regarding himself as a "slave," always rather exalted himself as a worshipper of the creed that the satisfaction of passion was "the highest rite of nature's temple." But this was as nothing in comparison with the feat of persuading Hearn, for whom beauty had always been the touchstone for worth, that this same beauty, which he idolized in every form from a Greek temple to a lovely woman, was a "needless, harmful, and even impossible thing in

<sup>1</sup> "Concerning Lafcadio Hearn."

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a world of adamantine logic and necessity." Of course after Hearn had accepted this, to him, revolutionary doctrine, it was an easy matter to teach him to listen to "Duty, Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!" But let the doctor continue the story in his own words:



A Cartoon Drawn by Hearn Which Appeared in the *Item*.

"This new viewpoint, this new spirit or soul, I got incorporated in a little art-work, or ethical study,—‘Karma,’—published in *Lippincott's Magazine*, May, 1890, after Hearn had gone to Japan. To the world, and without the knowledge of its making, ‘Karma’ must have seemed an illogical and even impossible thing for Hearn to have written. It is apparently the sole work which he ever wrote, created *de novo* and without the data having been found or brought to him from without."



## Dr. Gould and Mr. Hearn

You are left in no doubt as to whom the real credit belongs for the creation of "Karma," as the doctor continues quite frankly, even if not modestly:

"But it was only a *seeming* creation. It was only the telling, the colouring, that was his, as in his other tales before or after. In our long walks and talks in the Park at night, *we* wrought out the title, the datum, and the whole trend of the story. *He rebelled*,<sup>1</sup> but I held him to the task, which he finally executed with frank and artistic loyalty."<sup>2</sup>

Nor does the doctor minimize the significance of the creation of "Karma" in Hearn's spiritual life, when he says:

"I do not think there is exaggeration of the importance of the story, and what led up to its writing, in saying that it was the greatest of the turning points in his life, and that directly because of it the magnificent works of the Japanese period were profoundly influenced through the attitude of mind thereby gained."<sup>3</sup>

The writing of "Karma" proves, if nothing else, that Hearn earnestly tried to apply his friend's panacea to his own case; and his first enthusiastic acknowledgment of his spiritual change was contained in a letter which he wrote to Mr. Alden on July 3, 1889, in which he said:

"My friend is a much larger man than I had even imagined from my first knowledge of him;—he has taught me enough to make me over again in an

<sup>1</sup> The italics are the author's.

<sup>2</sup> "Concerning Lafcadio Hearn," Gould, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> "Concerning Lafcadio Hearn," Gould, p. 90.

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ethical way,—though I fear, it will be several years before I can show the result in a durable piece of work. . . . How wonderfully a strong well-trained mind can expand a feebler and undisciplined one, when the teacher has pleasure and time to teach!"<sup>1</sup>

But of course it was humanly impossible for the doctrines of a puritanical Anglo-Saxon to remain for very long the tenets of a Latin sensualist, and even the optimistic doctor was forced to cryptically say:

"But the Providence of the Oriental and semi-barbarous is Improvidence, and their God is Fate. Hearn came to hate the truth which had now slipped through his spiritual eyes,—"<sup>2</sup>

Hearn's common sense was often at fault, but his literary sense was always keenly accurate. What had actually occurred was that his common sense had reasserted itself and he realized that it could only end in disaster for him, steeped in the French Romantic School, to attempt to produce accounts of moral conflicts in which virtue was always victorious, and beauty was to be considered as excess baggage. He realized that his entire success depended upon the fact that he had been able to infuse real beauty into his writing. If beauty was harmful then what he had striven for was naught.

However, Hearn was so dominated by Dr. Gould's personality, that this realization did not come all at once—never completely arrived until he had gone from Philadelphia, beyond the sphere of his host's personal influence.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. Alden, July 3, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> "Concerning Lafcadio Hearn," Gould, p. 98.

## Dr. Gould and Mr. Hearn

In the meanwhile, however, it must be realized that Hearn did all in his power to repay the debt that the Doctor's hospitality imposed upon him. To Mr. Alden he continually wrote praising Dr. Gould's literary ability and offering to send some of his articles for *Harper's*, and in after years Hearn said that he had helped the doctor with his medical dictionary, written an article which the doctor had sold over his own signature for \$25, and placed another article for him in the *Arena* for which the doctor received \$85. In addition to this, Hearn completed his own arrangements for bringing out his West Indian sketches, under the title of "Two Years in the French West Indies" and wrote "Karma." *Harper's* refused the latter, but he placed it with *Lippincott's* later, through the mediation of Miss Margaret Bisland (a sister of Miss Bessie Bisland), who had a position with that magazine. He then began two more stories, to be written under the same inspiration and along the same lines as "Karma." One was to be called "Ruth" and the other "The Mother of God," but neither ever saw the light of day.

Other magazines began to take a flattering interest in his work, and Miss Bessie Bisland wrote him asking for a contribution for the Christmas number of the *Cosmopolitan*. He promised it, but, evidently, did not send it.

Hearn had written Alden that his state of mind was too happy to last and he seems to have had an uncanny foresight, for in the fall events arose that led him to return to New York. Dr. Gould's book gives no very precise account of the reasons for his departure beyond indefinitely saying that he felt a great pride in having compelled Hearn to go to Japan and that Hearn "had

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no thought of the journey when I showed him his duty and his opportunity." The Doctor further added that "By argument, pleading, almost compulsion, I, at last, wearied his opposition, and he went with reluctance, after months of halting in New York which he detested."

Hearn's own reasons for leaving the Doctor's roof are very clearly stated and differ materially. They are to be found in a letter which he wrote from Japan to his friend Ellwood Hendrick some time in 1890 or 1891. The letter was published in the *New York Times* of May 14th, 1908, in the course of a very acrimonious discussion which the publication of Dr. Gould's book inaugurated. It reads in part:

"You may remember I was in Philadelphia for about five months at the house of a physician named George M. Gould. This person had begged and prayed me to pass a summer with him before I went. He told me if I ever mentioned money to him he would think it an insult; his only desire was to aid me. Really, I don't know much about Northern human nature—never did; I always take people seriously. Well, his wife, he told me at last, was jealous of his friends; and she was not pleased to have me about. He gave me money—for I was dead broke, and said: 'Go to New York and see what the Harper's can do to sending you back to the Tropics. Then come back and tell me.'"

Hearn was never able to make himself agreeable to the wives of his friends. With Mrs. Krehbiel he was

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not very popular, and now with Mrs. Gould he was less so. No matter how much she trusted her husband, any woman would look askance at a man who could, in his conversation, paint the picturesque sensuality of the Antilles in such realistic and alluring colours.

With his usual genius for complicating his life, Hearn, before he left, laid the foundation for one of the bitterest literary controversies that ever took place in this country. Its echoes are still found scattered through the old files of the public press; it has been hinted at, in an ambiguous way, in various books, but nowhere has a complete unbiassed account of the whole affair ever been published. Shorn of its mysteries, the facts are baldly these.

Hearn promised to see that Dr. Gould got his library as security for the money already loaned him; and for this purpose he gave him a letter addressed to Alden. It instructed Alden, rather curtly, to turn all the books over to Gould, notwithstanding the holographic will which he had already made in Alden's favour. Hearn was penniless when he left Gould's, so the chances are that he had not repaid the advances made him by Alden, which probably explains why he requested Gould not to ask Alden for the books until after he had left for Japan. Once there, Hearn wrote a letter to Alden, which is quoted in full in a later chapter, in which he said: "I have also sent you a positive request to turn over my books to Dr. Gould. I am under larger obligations to him than to you, or to any one else in the East; he wants to be paid for his kindness and his expenses, and I have nothing else to pay him with."



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

But let the Doctor tell his side of the story:

"When he left my home, he, of his own accord, asked me to care for his library, then in the home of Mr. Alden at Metuchen, New Jersey, who two years previously had consented to take charge of it, and had paid shipping expenses, insurance, etc. None can imagine anything ungenerous or unkind in Mr. Alden. An old Cincinnati acquaintance characterizes Hearn's action in the matter as a 'swindle.' I have no knowledge or hint how it was or could be of that nature. Hearn wrote all the letters, and made all the arrangements to have the books sent to me."<sup>1</sup>

Once more, however, Hearn gives the more detailed account. In the same letter from which I have already quoted, Hearn said he wrote the Doctor that: "Alden has my books, worth \$2500; I can't take them from him just now but later on I will get you to get them from him."<sup>2</sup> He continued, saying that he gave the Doctor his note for \$60, the sum he owed him; an order to Mr. Alden to deliver the books; and later, a "fictitious I.O.U. sent him for the purpose of helping him get the books into his hands."<sup>2</sup>

The fictitious I.O.U. reads as follows: "I owe Dr. George M. Gould of Philadelphia the sum of \$500 for board and lodging during the summer of 1889. And in lieu of ready money I gave to him, unconditionally, my library, etc."<sup>2</sup>

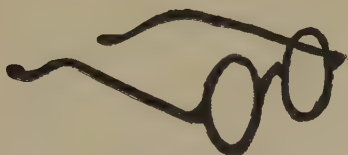
Having thus thoroughly entangled himself in this peculiar manifestation of "high finance" on a small scale, some time in Oct., 1889, Hearn sadly slipped away from Dr. Gould's house to go to New York.

<sup>1</sup> "Concerning Lafcadio Hearn," Gould, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> From an article by Ellwood Hendrick in which he quoted certain correspondence between himself and Hearn. *New York Times*, May 14, 1908.

## Dr. Gould and Mr. Hearn

Soon after reaching there he got a letter from Dr. Gould saying he could never receive him in his house again, but that since he had done some literary work for him, he could lend him \$20 more.





## XV: Final Days

IN the late eighties the Cordova and Navarro apartments in West Fifty-eighth Street, New York, sheltered a great many literary lions of that time. There, among others, lived both the Gilders, Clarence Edmund Stedman, Mary Mapes Dodge and her husband and Alice Wellington Rollins. But unfortunately Mrs. Rollins became so poor that she was on the point of being forced to move when Kate Douglas Wiggin heard of her predicament and suggested to Ellwood Hendrick, a young chemist of literary aspirations, that he and his sister join them and go to live in the Rollins' apartment and by sharing expenses keep Mr. and Mrs. Rollins from being compelled to give it up. The arrangements were easily made and the new tenants soon joined the delightful little evening parties so often given by various members of their circle. One night one of these affairs

## Final Days

was not going so well; everybody was sitting around the room, man and woman, man and woman, talking politely about nothing when a late guest arrived bringing with him a lady whom no one knew. In the words of the young chemist, "She was a devilishly beautiful woman, and it wasn't a minute before she was the centre of a crowd composed of all the men in the room, while the women still sat, lonely sentinels, in every other chair." It was Bessie Bisland, come up from New Orleans to try her literary pinions in New York, and it did not take her long, with her vital personality, to become a full-fledged member of the group. She spoke very often of a queer little friend of hers, half blind and peculiar, who wielded a picturesque pen, overflowed with strange exotic information, and wrote the most harmonious and elaborate prose. When Hearn's articles began to come out in *Harper's* she pointed to them as proof of her statements. A curiosity about this idiosyncratic personality began to grow and when, in the late fall of 1889, Miss Bisland announced he was in New York, Mrs. Rollins promptly said, "Bring him to dinner."

The night came and the guests assembled. They waited and waited, but no Hearn. At the end of half an hour, a worried hostess started her guests in to dinner. The emptiness of that one chair seemed to depress every one. Suddenly, just as the salad was being served, a noise was heard in the kitchen and Mrs. Rollins looked up apprehensively in time to see a perfect stranger coming through the pantry into the dining-room in a scared tentative way. His collar was too big for his neck, his clothes were peculiar, and he seemed absolutely petrified as he stood there, an enormous black felt hat dangling in his hand. Miss Bisland glanced up

too and, jumping to her feet, dragged the limp little man over to her hostess to introduce him. Lafcadio Hearn had made his *début* in New York society, via the back door! They placed him in the empty chair and tried in vain to make him feel at ease. But he ate nothing nor would he say a word beyond the mere statement that he had been lost and had wandered over New York for hours. Later investigation developed the fact that the door-man of the apartment house had decided that the queer figure, enquiring for Mrs. Rollins was not "carriage company" so he had insisted on sending him up in the back elevator to the kitchen.

As they went into the drawing-room, more guests arrived and this influx finished Hearn who took refuge in the farthest corner, huddled up in a chair like a little wet bird. To her secret mortification, Miss Bisland's Southern lion wouldn't roar; he had metamorphosed into a timid, panic-stricken lamb. As each person was led up to meet him, he half rose from his chair, murmured, with the slight trace of Irish brogue that he always had, "Very pleased, I'm sure," and then slipped back, silent as a mummy.

Big, kind-hearted Hendrick pitied the sufferings of this small pathetic figure so he went to him and said: "I've got a date with some people downtown, whenever you are ready to go let me know."

"Oh! that would be very nice, very nice indeed," said Hearn, with a sigh of relief.

"I'm in no hurry," replied Hendrick, "we'll go whenever you're ready."

"But I'm ready now," unhesitatingly said Hearn.

So it was Ellwood Hendrick who made Hearn's excuses to his hostess and steered him from the room and



## Final Days

out into the street. They started to walk downtown and, as usual, the traffic terrified Hearn and he seized the arm of his big companion just as he had seized Denny Corcoran's in New Orleans or Krehbiel's in Cincinnati and New York.

Big men (Denny weighed over 300 pounds, Krehbiel about 210, and Hendrick 227) always inspired confidence in Hearn, made him feel perfectly safe, and he seemed never to fail to awaken in them a strong protecting instinct. And so it was that Hearn felt once more at ease, clutching Ellwood Hendrick's arm as they walked down Broadway together, the glaring brilliancy and movement of which was in strange contrast to the silent, sinister, dark and unevenly paved streets, to which he had been accustomed in St. Pierre.

When they got down opposite the old Koster and Bial's beer garden, Hendrick invited Hearn to go in and have a glass of beer. Hearn hesitated, saying: "Well, beer in the tropics always disagrees with me, but here—yes, I'd like some."

They went in, sat down at a table and over their glasses began to talk—such talk as Hendrick had never heard before. After years he can only remember the bare bones of it, but the memory of the fascination which it held for him is as vivid to-day as it was the day after he heard it. They were oblivious of everything else and talked until early morning. The clatter of dishes, the noise of the orchestra, the hurry of the waiters and the passing of harlots impinged not at all on their consciousness. As long as the sound of Hearn's low, gentle voice continued it was as if their table was a tiny island and they the sole inhabitants. Eventually Hendrick took him back to his boarding-house. This was the be-

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

ginning of a warm friendship, and they met two or three times a week. When they dined together Hearn refused to have any one else and insisted on paying his half of the check. Some evenings they called at Miss Bisland's rooms over a *confiserie* at 475 Fourth Ave. Here they often tried to outsit the rich admirers who had begun to cluster round (among them the man she afterwards married), but without success. The "jeune fille un peu farouche," as Hearn once described her, had developed into a handsome, daring, intellectual woman of the world, of poise and self-confidence, and with these changes Hearn's feelings altered and he began making excuses for his former harsher judgment of her. He wrote Dr. Matas explaining this, and said: "I met Miss Bisland again, she has expanded mentally and physically into one of the most superb women you could wish to converse with. I think differently of her. I am inclined to suspect her alleged cruelty and hardness of character are to be accounted for by the impatience of a very keen strong mind with trivialities and egotisms. It now seems to me as if I had only seen the *chrysalis* of her before; this is the silk moth!"

The rather paternal but critically helpful attitude of the *Times-Democrat* days mixed, as it was at times, with the most severe censure of some of her traits of character, had given place to a very much warmer feeling—Hearn was in love with her. He knew it was hopeless; those visits when he sat tongue-tied and silent in a corner and watched men of lesser brains but more assurance do all the talking convinced him of that; and he hated them for their glibness and their money and their smart clothes. At rare intervals Hearn did talk brilliantly, but the entrance of some new guest was always sufficient

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to silence him—and yet he continued to go, and his last letters written to her in New York and from Japan show a most delicate but understanding affection.

Hendrick had told his sister and her friend, Miss Helen Gould, so much about Hearn that they were most anxious to meet him so Hendrick undertook the difficult task of bringing it about. But it didn't prove difficult at all, for when he suggested to Hearn that they call on Miss Gould at her father's house he was amazed that Hearn agreed at once without any hesitation. This was just at the time when Jay Gould was regarded with special odium as being the incarnation of predatory wealth, and Hendrick wondered why Hearn had agreed; so, looking down at the little man clinging to his arm, he said: "I'm surprised I could get you to go to Jay Gould's." "Oh!" replied Hearn, snuggling up to his big friend, "I'd go anywhere with you." When they arrived at the house, 5th Avenue and 47th Street, Hendrick rang the bell. A butler, far more distinguished and important looking than the average American ambassador to the Court of St. James, opened the door and recognizing Mr. Hendrick permitted him to enter, but started to slam the door in the face of the queer shabby looking individual who had been standing in the shadow. Hendrick intervened quickly and explained that the gentleman was with him whereupon the butler let Hearn in. They were ushered into a perfectly enormous and overpowering drawing-room. Hendrick said he could almost see Hearn flinch as he went in, and when he saw him hunch down into a chair like a sick bird, he knew something was very wrong. He hazarded a guess, so when Miss Gould and Miss Hendrick came in he asked: "Haven't you got any little room that

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

won't be so big for four people?" Miss Gould said, "Of course," and led them into a cheerful sort of boudoir. When the door was closed he knew he had sized up the difficulty, for Hearn seemed human again and, in reply to the girls' questions about St. Pierre, he described it, its customs and its folklore in his most entrancing manner. No one there has ever forgotten the charm of his conversation, and Hendrick was delighted that Bessie Bisland's Southern lion had roared louder for him than for her.

About this time J. Henry Harper gave a dinner in honour of Edwin Abbey and sent an invitation to Hearn, who replied with a queer little note which showed how unaccustomed he was to such affairs:

"Dear Mr. Harper:—

"I shall be very happy to meet yourself and Mr. Abbey at the Union League Club at the time appointed.

"Faithfully,

"LAFCADIO HEARN.

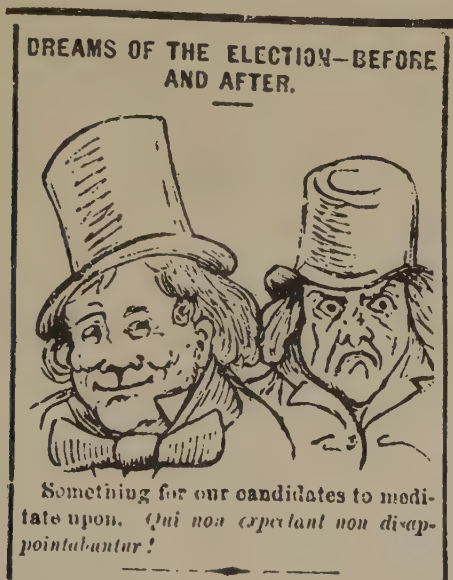
"West 10th Street, Jan. 21, 1890."

Alden had promised to convoy Hearn, but when he arrived at his rooms, he found him in a blue funk, absolutely refusing to budge. Finally he was prevailed upon to change his mind and they started. It was lucky Alden was with him, else he never would have gotten by the doorman for C. D. Weldon, the artist, who later accompanied him to Japan, was present and has described his costume as almost fantastic for such an occasion. He said Hearn wore a coat cut like a pea-jacket, two or three sizes too large, while above his low, yawning

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collar coyly peeked a generous corner of the red-flannel undershirt which he wore as protection against the unaccustomed cold. He must have looked (as one of his New Orleans friends said) "exactly like a shipwrecked sailor."

Many of the most prominent artists and literary men of the city were there—Wm. Dean Howells, F. Hop-



A Political Cartoon Drawn by Hearn and Published in the *Item*.

kinson Smith, Stanford White, A. B. Frost, Frederick Remington, William Chase, William Rogers and some dozen others. Hearn seemed panic-stricken during the introductions and, when they were over, the strain having been more than he could stand, he bolted for the door but Alden saw him out of the corner of his eye and, dashing across the room, grabbed his coattails and pulled him back by force.



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

An incident which happened at dinner put him more at his ease. William Dean Howells pointed Hearn out to Harper and asked who he was. Harper said, "Why, you know who Lafcadio Hearn is, I introduced you before dinner." Howells jumped up and, going around to him, shook his hand cordially, saying, "The name Hearn meant nothing to me, but there's only one Lafcadio Hearn and I'm so pleased to meet you that I had to come to shake hands again." Hearn blossomed out after that and had such a good time that he was among the last to leave.

All during the winter Hearn had been corresponding with a brother whose whereabouts he had learned in a curious way. Soon after he had gone to live with his aunt, Mrs. Brenane, James, his younger brother, had been sent to a boarding-school in Alton, Hampshire, England, which was run by Dr. Stewart, an old Scotchman. He stayed there until he was 16 years of age, when he too came to New York and later to Wisconsin to stay with friends. James seems to have been more practical than Lafcadio for he started as a market gardener. When Lafcadio was a reporter in Cincinnati, James was a flour-miller in Gibsonburg, Ohio, and although they were both in the same state and separated only by a few hours' travel, neither knew the other was alive. From Gibsonburg he drifted to Bradner, Ohio, where he saw mention of Lafcadio in a Cleveland paper and this led to his writing a letter which Hearn received while at Dr. Gould's. He answered it in a truly characteristic manner. Suspicious as always, he thought it might be a subtle stratagem of an autograph hunter, so he wrote,

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"To James D. Hearn

"DEAR SIR,—

"Details of letter sparse, incorrect and unsatisfactory. Can you answer the following questions."

Then followed a string of queries of intimate family details which only a brother could know. James answered them all and for "lagniappe" enclosed his father's picture. Lafcadio Hearn had gone to New York by this time and he wrote his brother from his Tenth Street address. A short correspondence followed and brought out certain interesting details of their early life. Their ears were pierced when they were young and they wore tiny gold earrings, and on their little bodies their mother had made three small wounds, a superstitious practice indulged in for the purpose of placing her children under the protection of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The picture of his father interested him, but he wrote to James and said:

"I suspect I do not love him. . . . The soul in me is not of him. Whatever there is of good in me—and, I believe, whatever there is of deeper good in yourself—came from that dark race soul of which we know so little. My love of right, my hate of wrong, my admiration for what is beautiful or true, my capacity for faith in man or woman, my sensitiveness to artistic things, which gives me what ever little *success I have*—even that language-power whose physical sign is in the large eyes of both of us—came from Her."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Lafcadio Hearn's Brother," *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1923.

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The day before he left for Japan he wrote his brother a short note promising to send his address from Yokohama. This was the last James heard from Lafcadio.

Some time during the winter Page Baker came to New York and saw Hearn several times, but he was ashamed to have Baker know that he had only made \$50 during the preceding six months, so he behaved as though he were on the crest of the wave. Baker really wanted him to come back to the *Times-Democrat*, but thought that mere newspaper work was far beneath the attention of such a successful littérateur, so he remained silent. It was not until years afterward, when Hearn wrote to him from Japan, that he admitted he had been crazy to go back to the *Times-Democrat*, but had been too proud to acknowledge his defeat.

The dwindling fortune that Hearn had not been able to confess to Baker made it imperative for him to find work. When he was in New Orleans he had been in correspondence with the Art Editor of *Harper's*, Wm. Patten, and later, after he had arrived in New York, Mr. Krehbiel had brought them together. Now he looked him up again and they became good friends. He used to make his way often to Patten's rooms at 133 West 47th Street and they found many subjects of common interest. Patten had made quite a study of Japanese Art and Literature and had a collection of books bearing on them. Many of these were new to Hearn, although he had been interested in these subjects as far back as his days on the *Item*.

A letter he wrote at this time shows how deeply immersed in Japanese literature he had become.

"MY DEAR MR. PATTEN:—

"I appreciate the great kindness of lending me

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those very curious and valuable books, much more than I can tell you. They were all new to me; and it was quite a treat to look at them. Mr. Chamberlain's <sup>1</sup> own translation of the *Ko pi KI* interests me especially,—and also the ethnological study of Aino influences in formation of Japanese myths and language.

“You would very much enjoy,—if you have not already seen any of them,—the beautiful Japanese texts published by F. Turretin, with illustrations, a French literal translation, and the Japanese in Roman letters. (‘*Ta-mi-no Nigivai*’ *Stsume Goma*) E. Leroux, of Paris, is the principal dealer in these: you can get his beautiful catalogue through Christern or Bouton (706 Broadway)—Bouton is far the nicer man to deal with. Then in the general catalogue of *Maisonnette & Cie.* 25 *Quai Voltaire*, Paris (*Catalogue de livres de fonds et en nombre*), you will find a nice list of Japanese oddities: brief but peculiar, including the *Si-Ka-Zen-Yo*. Indeed it will pay you, if interested in these Oriental literatures, to secure a set of *Maisonnette* catalogues: they are linguistically classed according to branches of tongues.

“*Rosny's Histoire Divine des Dynasties Japonaises* translated into the French from the Chinese and the Japanese texts, you might also like. It obtained a recent prize from the *Academie des Inscriptions*, but it is rather costly—50 francs. The *Li-Ka-Zen-Yo* is about 30; but it is a book of such beauty that I don't think the buyer could ever regret the purchase.

“I wish I had met you earlier and had a little

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Prof. Basil Hall Chamberlain's book, “*Things Japanese*,” contains a chapter on Japanese Pipes written by Hearn after he got to Japan. This, however, only appears in the second edition.

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more time to chat with you about what we are both fond of. With every thanks for your kindness, believe me,

“Yours very sincerely,  
“LAFCADIO HEARN.”

The discussions which arose from the reading of these books led Hearn to tell Patten that he thought if he could be sent to Japan, he could do better work than he had done in the West Indies. Patten was enthusiastic about the idea and promised to do all in his power. He suggested that Hearn write him a letter outlining the subjects he proposed covering and his general plan of treatment in the event that he undertook the trip. This Hearn did as follows:

<sup>1</sup> “MY DEAR MR. PATTEN:—

“In attempting a book upon a country so well trodden as Japan, I could not hope—nor would I consider it prudent attempting,—to discover totally new things, but only to consider things in a totally new way, so far as possible. I would put as much *life* and *colour* especially into such a book, as I could, and attempt to interpret the former rather through vivid sensation given to the reader, than by any account or explanations such as may be found in other writers, whether travellers or scholars. Such a book would therefore be essentially a volume of Sketches brief for the most part,—each one reflecting a peculiar phase of life. Until one is upon the ground, it would not be possible to lay down a decided plan of work; but I have drawn up a tentative list of subjects which I think should form part of such a book,—several of which have not been, to

<sup>1</sup> Letter in the collection of Mr. S. J. Schwartz of New Orleans. The letters addressed to Patten which follow are also from the same collection.



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the best of my belief, previously treated in any *popular* book on Japan.

“First impressions: climate and scenery; the poetry of nature in Japan.

“City life to the foreigner.

“Art in everyday life: effect of foreign influences on art products.

“The new civilization.

“Amusements.

“The Guéchas (dancing girls) and their profession.

“The new Educational system,—child life—child games, etc.

“Home life and popular domestic religion.

“Public cults—Temple ceremonies and the duties of worshippers.

“Curiosities of Legends and superstitions.

“Woman’s life in Japan.

“Old popular melodies and songs.

“The Old Masters of Japan—in the arts: their influence as a survival or a memory; their powers or value as reflectors of the life and nature of the country.

“Curiosities of popular speech,—singularities of verbal usage in everyday life.

“The social organism,—political and military conditions.

“Japan as a place to settle in; the situation of the foreign element, etc.

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"But the titles of the real chapters, I would make altogether romantic—possibly Japanese; and would attempt nothing really in the shape of essays. A subject would be considered solely in the relation of personal experiences bearing upon it, from which relation anything bordering upon commonplace narrative would be carefully excluded. The studied aim would be to create, in the minds of the readers, a vivid impression of *living* in Japan,—not simply as an observer but as one taking part in the daily existence of the common people, and *thinking with their thoughts*. Whenever possible a narrative would be made at least as entertaining as a short story.

"I would also expect to prepare a novelette, toward the latter part of my stay, depicting Japanese feeling.

"This is about the best suggestion I can at present offer regarding the plan of the book.

"Very sincerely yours,

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

"149 West 10th Street,

"Nov. 28, 1889."

"I should expect to make a volume containing quite as much text as the West Indian book—in the neighbourhood of five hundred pages. In another form, this amount of text would, in larger type and a different setting, suffice for a very much handsomer volume."

Having this letter as a basis upon which to work, the energetic Mr. Patten took the next necessary steps. Deciding that illustrations would add a great deal, he went to C. D. Weldon, the artist, and persuaded him to take



### SPANISH MOSS.

In goblin tooms,  
Depending from the many-elbowed arms  
Of gnarled oaks, thou weavest Druid charms  
Under weird moons'

Thy night-mare hug  
Stills the moaning of the dying pine;  
The cedars know that strangler's cord of thine,  
O vegetable Thug.

Thy robes of rags  
The mightiest monarchs of the woods must wear,  
And wreath their crowns with locks of thy grey  
hair

Like a Witch-hug  
What greatly foods  
Sustain thy spectral sap, thy phantom breath  
Thou Succubus, thou eldritch Life in Death,  
Thou Vampire of the Woods'

L. H. A. N.

A poem Hearn wrote and illustrated for the *Item*. It is the only contribution which he signed; probably because he thought it was particularly good.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

the trip in the event it could be arranged. Then he showed Hearn's letter to Mr. Alden and unfolded to him the complete plan. It secured Alden's hearty approval and co-operation, so much so, in fact, that he wrote a letter to Patten in which he said:

"Your idea of a Japanese trip involving sufficient time to secure careful studies of the country and people, to be undertaken by Lafcadio Hearn and C. D. Weldon has naturally my cordial sympathy as an editor. I sincerely hope your plan may succeed . . . there is no writer of English so capable as he of fully appreciating and of adequately portraying with the utmost charm and felicity every shade, however quaint and subtle, of the life of strange people. The result of close studies by him in Japan will be a revelation to all readers."

It must be remembered that Patten was acting upon his own initiative in making these arrangements and not as an agent for Harper Bros., and so it became necessary for him to find some way to finance the expedition as Hearn was, as usual, hard up. Patten was young and resourceful and this task did not seem impossible. Armed with Alden's letter he took train for Montreal, where he called on Sir William Van Horne, president of the Canadian Pacific R. R. Co. and Steamship lines. Sir William listened to his plan and told him to come back later for an answer, but in the meantime, his suspicions having been aroused by Patten's apparent youth, he wired the House of Harper to see if he was, in reality, what he represented himself to be. Upon receiving a reassuring answer, Sir William

## Final Days

made up for his unjust suspicions by inviting him to dinner and, over their coffee, they came to an understanding by which Hearn and Weldon were to receive free passage to and from Japan and \$250 in gold each upon their arrival in Montreal. In return for this Patten agreed that Hearn and Weldon would do some travel articles for the purpose of inspiring the public with an unquenchable desire to see Japan, to the financial benefit of the C.P.R.R. and its Steamship Co.

Patten wrote Hearn of the success of his visit and received an answer, expressing delight with the arrangements made, and enthusiastic approval of his selection of Weldon to do the illustrations.

“Monday.

“Dear Patten:

“Your kind letter of Saturday reached me this morning. I shall certainly preserve it, but not at all for the purpose you suggest; simply because there is a grace of friendship in it which I would not wish to lose.

“I passed Sunday evening with Weldon, seems to be in every way a splendid fellow; and I believe we shall be in thorough sympathy artistically, which you know is the all-important, sensitive, and trenchant point in undertakings of this kind. My previous doubts in this regard have ceased to exist.

“The financial settlement you so happily made, smooths matters considerably; for I should have found myself otherwise in a tight place. As it is I must try to make a little money before starting; and the delay is a godsend.

“There are only two things which could prevent the undertaking, so far as I am concerned, from be-



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ing all you desire; inability to remain in the country and move about in it for a sufficient length of time, or sickness. The first is more probable to occur than the last. I am convinced beyond all question, that until one can learn the language of the people, one cannot do much more than what has been already done—exquisitely done. Most writers upon Japan excepting linguists and ethnologists, have confined themselves to visional impressions, and have made their books on Japan like Gautier's book on Spain—in which there are no Spaniards; I *think* that the best work will be that done after the first year; but we are going to do something *quite new*—indeed, if I did not believe this possible, I would not want to make the attempt.

“Very truly your friend,

“LAFCADIO HEARN.

“149 W. 10th Street.

“Feb. 3, 1890.”

But when Hearn's first enthusiasm had worn off, he began to worry about the financial aspect, which resulted in a letter to Mr. Alden as follows: <sup>1</sup>

“My dear Mr. Alden:—

“I want to place before you my situation in regard to the proposed Japanese trip. There are hundreds of difficulties about it; and I do not see what can be done as the matter now stands.

“I have no assurance of any means beyond \$250 to be paid at Montreal. Even supposing myself able to earn something before the date of starting,

<sup>1</sup> A particular point of interest in this letter is Hearn's statement that the “artist . . . receives far higher prices than I.” This was written a month before his departure and gives the lie to the oft repeated tale that he severed his connection with *Harper's* after he arrived in Japan because he had suddenly discovered that Weldon's pay was greater than his.

## Final Days

such sum would, according to present indications, barely enable me to procure a few absolute necessities for the journey, and pay a few small debts.

"This leaves \$250. The journey, which will of course involve expenses, food, lodging, fees, etc. (according to my experience) can scarcely be less than \$50.

"With \$200, then I begin Japan. The first few months in a strange country always cost more than any other period of the sojourn. The \$200 would have to last me six months,—I could not reckon with any certitude on receiving further remittances before August. The means at my disposal would be something like a dollar a day. The artist is happily independent of these conditions; he receives furthermore, far higher prices than I, for such work as we might do; but under these circumstances I cannot possibly keep up with him, except by borrowing money from him, and remaining dependent upon him. The work done at a cost of a thousand dollars, other conditions being equal, is going to be highly different from this work costing only a hundred. I will have to do cheap work.

"The West Indian book was no cheap work. I first spent upon it \$500 of my own savings, plus some of what 'Chita' brought me. The second time I went to the tropics equipped with as much means again. Even then, with a warm climate, and cheap living, I nearly failed for want of means. I was familiar with Creole life and speech already: but this Japan is in the latitude of New York with far more difficult conditions, and I have to depend on only \$200.

"Money worries impair creative work exceedingly. But to face the uncertainties of climatic

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possibilities of sickness, inevitable delay in moving about the country (for no movement will be possible until the second remittances come in), on \$200 means more than worry.

"The best writers in the world have been in Japan, with plenty of means. Without money enough to move out of my lodgings in a country as large as Great Britain, I do not see how I shall be able to do anything more than waste time or ever be able to get back again. To be only able to live means to be unable to do anything else. The *Tribune* sends a man to South America, not only paying him a salary of several hundred dollars per month (75 per week, I think) but furnishing him with letter of credit, all for a few rough letters. The conditions are grossly unfair; if another will tackle the job, I shall not be sorry.

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

The very next day Harper Bros. answered this letter, stating in detail their position in the matter and what arrangements they were willing to make with him.

"Feb. 13, 1890.

"DEAR MR. HEARN:—

"For the Japanese enterprise the Messrs. Harper are in no way responsible. They did not initiate the undertaking, and all they have done toward forwarding it is incidental and amounts to this—viz., that they have promised to avail themselves of the literary and art results of the trip in so far as the material offered us by yourself and Mr. Weldon may prove satisfactory for use in their periodicals, and to such an extent as may seem desirable in the judgment of their editors; and in particular they

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have agreed to publish in their *magazine* an article on 'The New Civilization in Japan' provided you shall offer them a satisfactory article on that subject.

"But we wish now to make some definite arrangements with you in connection with the literary results of this expedition.

"I. We are willing to take from you material on Japanese subjects amounting altogether to 60,000 words, provided that in subject and treatment it is in our judgment, satisfactory for use in our periodicals.

"II. As we reserve to ourselves freedom of judgment, we leave to you freedom of action as to choice of subjects, etc., but we would especially like to have for our *magazine* an article on 'The New Civilization in Japan,' to be forwarded to us at the earliest moment practicable.

"III. No article is to exceed ten thousand words in length.

"IV. As a rule the articles should be illustrated with Mr. Weldon's co-operation; but we do not wish to limit you to such articles as require illustration. If, for example, you wish to give us an example of Japanese conversation showing its peculiar idioms, in an article of two or three thousand words, you might do so. But in this and in all cases it is desirable that you should show your material to Mr. Weldon, who might see in it the motif for a head- or tail-piece or both.

"V. We could not publish articles of a speculative or scientific character on the religion of the country—or on its language. We could treat religious practices only as they enter into the life of the people.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

"VI. For matter accepted for our *magazine* we will pay you at the rate of twenty dollars a thousand words—and for the matter accepted for our other periodicals at the rate of fifteen dollars a thousand words.

"VII. It is understood that we are to have the refusal of all you write on Japan for periodical publication, and that the Messrs. Harper shall have the option of publishing any or all of this series which they find available in book form, paying you a 10 per cent. royalty on retail (trade list) price for all copies sold, subject to the usual conditions of their contracts with authors."

Within a few days Hearn accepted the Harper conditions and they replied:

"Feb. 17, 1890.

"DEAR MR. HEARN:—

"We have yours of the 15th. acceding to the terms mentioned in our letter to you of the 13th inst. We are willing that you should send us your articles when they are ready, if you will send with each a list made by Mr. Weldon of the subjects he proposes to illustrate. It is important that we should have your article before we finally determine what illustrations we shall use." <sup>1</sup>

It is probable that Patten had a great deal to do with Hearn's accepting the Harper terms, for when he heard of his letter of February 12th to Alden suggesting that he give up the trip for lack of sufficient finances, he jumped into the breach and smoothed over the difficulty by promising Hearn to find ways by which he could earn

<sup>1</sup> "The 'House of Harper,'" J. Henry Harper, p. 588.

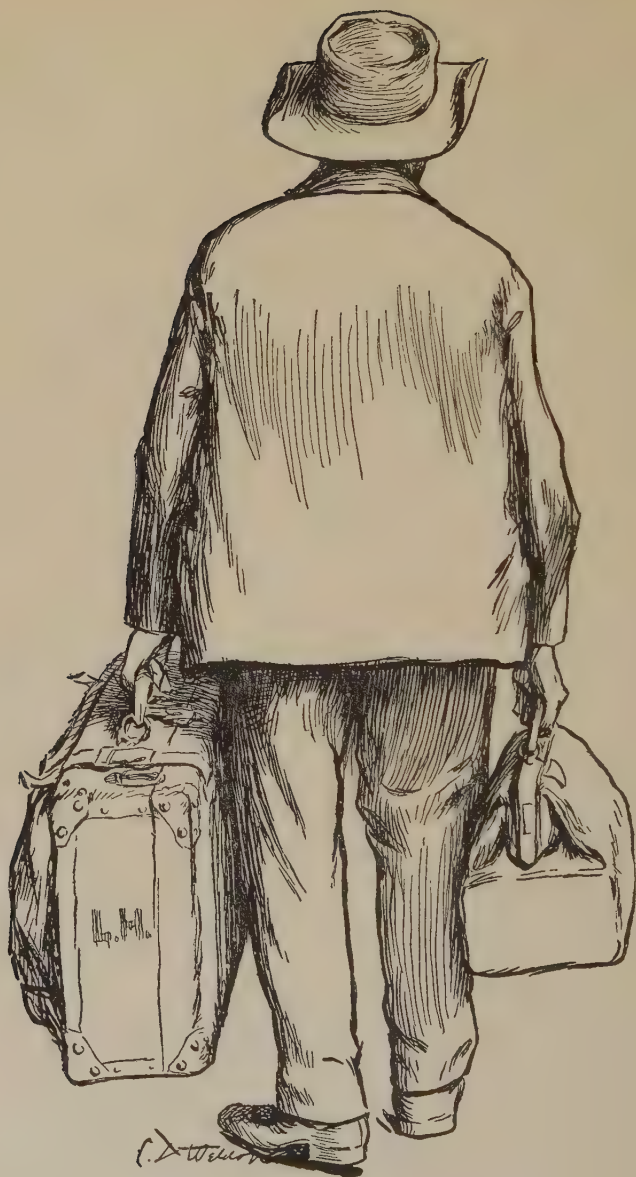


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some money before he left. In pursuance of this scheme, Patten persuaded Arthur B. Turnure, then the editor of *Cosmopolitan*, to buy one of his articles and, in all probability, Miss Bisland helped to bring this about. Next he enlisted the aid of J. Henry Harper, and together they placed another article with Mrs. Sangster, the editress of *Harper's Bazaar*.

"Youma" was about to come out in book form and Patten, realizing that in the ordinary course of events its sales would not be very large, hit upon a scheme to increase them. He bought from Vantine's their entire stock of blue and white Japanese crêpe and had the whole edition bound in it, in the hope that this would make it a popular Easter gift book. His scheme had most gratifying results.

Later Patten suggested to Harper Bros. that they allow Hearn to make a translation of Anatole France's "Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard" to put in their series of French translations which they were publishing. By the time this was agreed upon Hearn was very eager to leave for Japan. He hated cold weather and he hated New York, and he had been forced to endure both, consequently he determined to make as quick a job of it as possible. Shutting himself up in some rooms in 149 West 10th Street, which he shared with his old friend Tunison, he started to work at top speed. Even under these circumstances there were days when he accomplished nothing. The test by which he determined his fitness to work on any particular day was most amusingly erratic. He always slept in a darkened room, so he told Patten, and when he awoke in the morning his first act was to reach over and take a stogie from a box which he kept beside his bed. When he lit it, if it did not taste



Sketch by C. D. Weldon from memory, of how Hearn looked as he was leaving New York for Japan.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

just right, he turned over and went back to sleep, convinced that he would not be able to do any work on that day because climatic conditions were against him.

It was on one of these off days that he decided to call on Krehbiel and get a pair of shoes he had left there a long while before. With all the usual difficulties of locomotion through New York, which irritated him to the last degree, he made his way to the Krehbiel apartment. A new maid answered his ring and informed him, through a crack in the door, that the whole family had gone out of town. She had often been warned about strange men and the eerie little figure with his bulging eye had the look of a banshee to her superstitious mind. When Hearn asked to come in to get his shoes, the maid's panic became complete and, slamming the door in his face, she remained deaf to his furious ringing of the bell. After a while he desisted and, fuming, made his slow tedious way back to his downtown boarding house. Once there he sulked, working himself up into one of his terrible rages. "The servant took me for a thief," he brooded, "maybe it was my looks she didn't like. Krehbiel shouldn't keep a servant like that in his house—it is an outrage." The incident festered in his warped mind and assumed the proportions of a savage and wilful injury inflicted upon him by Krehbiel, so he wrote his old friend a letter, unreasonable and irrational, in which he said he had never before been so humiliated, that he had been treated like a common thief and that if Krehbiel wished to see him before he left for Japan he could call at his rooms. Krehbiel was thoroughly exasperated by this letter and his only answer was:

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"Dear Hearn:

"You can go to Japan or you can go to HELL."

Only once, after this note, did they meet. When Krehbiel called on Joseph Tunison, he had to pass through the sitting-room where Hearn was at work, translating "Sylvestre Bonnard." Hearn looked up, but neither man spoke. A stony stare set the period to their years of friendship.

A break in their intimacy had been inevitable from the first, their personalities were too much at variance. Krehbiel was Teutonic and the son of a clergyman and had the most decided ideas on sex morality—so decided, in fact, that when a certain internationally famous opera singer wrote him to ask why he did not mention her singing in his criticisms in the *Tribune*, he answered her saying that as long as she so flagrantly continued to deviate from the path of virtue, he would confine his remarks about her, to the bald statement that she was among those who sang. Nothing could be more antipodal to Krehbiel's point of view on this subject than Hearn's, and during their long separation he had sunk even deeper into habits of sexual indulgence than in the days of their Cincinnati companionship. This difference in code inspired in Krehbiel a certain critical attitude of which he himself was almost unconscious, but Hearn was always quick to catch even the shadow of disapprobation and it only needed a suspicion of it to throw him into a simmering rage. The explanation, or at least an approximate one, of Hearn's absurd behaviour in this case, is probably to be found in just such a reaction, on his part—an instinctive resentment of a critical attitude of mind, an attitude too intangible to

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afford a peg upon which he could hang his umbrage. However, it is unfortunate that he should have seized upon so puerile a pretext to end a friendship so fine-grained and of such long standing. But then that was Hearn.

The translation was finished in a marvellously short time—two weeks. *Harper's* paid him \$115 for it and, in addition, supplied him with a girl stenographer, for it was humanly impossible for him to have written it all in longhand in that short space of time. Years afterward, Hearn said that while, in the main, the stenographer was a great help, she still had her disadvantages, for she was so pretty that she interfered with his powers of concentration and he almost fell in love with her.

When the money for this work had been paid, Hearn decided he had enough with which to start his journey. His last evening he spent with Hendrick, who also accompanied him to the station the next morning, where they met Weldon. Hearn staggered under two enormous bags into which he had stuffed all his worldly possessions, but, nevertheless, boarded the train with his heart singing in anticipation of adventures to come.

It was on March 6th, 1890,<sup>1</sup> that he left New York for Montreal, and when he crossed the Canadian border Lafcadio Hearn's American days were done.

<sup>1</sup> There has been much controversy about the date of Hearn's departure for Japan. Bisland says May 8th, Kennard, March 8th, and Patten wrote in a letter, years afterward, that Hearn left in April. However, in an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* of January, 1923, called "Lafcadio Hearn's Brother," a letter is quoted in which Hearn said he would leave New York on March 6th.







## XVI: Aftermath

EVEN after Hearn crossed the border accounts with the United States were not completely settled. Certain happenings remain to be told because they form a disagreeable aftermath. They were properly a part of his American experiences, for they had their beginnings here and it was not until they had been concluded that he definitely cut himself off from this country.

As early in the journey as his arrival in Montreal, he showed signs of a brewing storm. In a letter written to Patten he asked him to arrange to have a separate check given to him by the C.P.R.R. Co., instead of lumping the sum, owed them both, in one payment to Weldon. The letter concluded with a P.S. "I was totally ignored in Montreal by Mr. McNicoll,<sup>1</sup> who evidently considered

<sup>1</sup> Donald McNicoll (later knighted), then the passenger agent of the C.P.R.R.

## Aftermath

me in charge of your artist. Mr. Weldon found it inconvenient to make the arrangement agreed upon at our last meeting."

However, when they started across the continent, Hearn seemed to forget his huff and was pleasant all the way. They finally arrived in Vancouver, B. C., and sailed on the steamship *Abyssinia* on March 17th. The ship was small and crowded with Chinese, alive and dead. One hundred live ones swarmed in the steerage, while the hold held 60 bodies being returned to China for burial. The passengers' peace of mind was rather interfered with by a pessimistic captain who burst into the tiny smoking-room, at least two or three times a day, to predict an uprising among the Chinese steerage passengers and crew.

On April 4th they arrived in Japan. It was a gorgeous, sunshiny morning, coming after days of dreary weather. Hearn and Weldon, leaning over the rail, watched the strange boats putting out from Yokohama to meet the steamer, and raised their eyes to Fusiyama, austere pure, beautiful and cold, like a vision of unattainable virtue. Hearn was thrilled and his voice trembled as he said, "I want to die here!" But Weldon, far more prosaic and practical, replied, "Well, I don't. I want to live here!"

That evening Hearn, Weldon and some of their fellow passengers went to see a geisha performance. They danced the dance become famous in port towns, and each geisha paid a forfeit by removing some article of clothing for every mistake in gesture or step. Hearn became fascinated, just as he had when he went to the quadron ball in New Orleans, and when his friends were ready to leave he refused to go with them.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

The next day he and Weldon met to talk things over. They decided it was the best plan to separate and each go his own way, and as soon as Hearn had written an article, for him to give a list of the illustrations he wanted to Weldon.

It began to rain and it rained for four weeks without a break. Hearn could not get out to see the people and the places to write about. Prices of living were very much higher than he expected, and he watched his small capital dwindling daily. He became terribly depressed, and his enforced idleness gave him much time to brood (always a dangerous thing for him). He began to read over his contract letter with *Harper's* and a black pall of suspicion and unreasoning rage closed down over his mind and obscured his judgment.

Weldon had only seen him a few times since they landed. Once he found him mooning around a Chinese graveyard and had remonstrated saying he knew *Harper's* was in a hurry to get something in order to forestall *Scribner's*, who were also planning some articles on Japan, and that there were plenty of Japanese things to write about without wasting time in a Chinese graveyard. They did not meet again until the seventh of May when he ran into Hearn, by chance, coming up from the wharfs. Hearn seemed quite excited and said, "Well, I've done it!" "Done what?" asked Weldon. "I called Harry Harper and Alden . . . told them what I thought of them," replied Hearn. "Well," said Weldon, "I guess the jig's up now." But hoping against hope, he said, "You haven't sent the letter yet, have you?" Hearn waved his hand toward a steamer just leaving the harbour and replied, "Oh, yes, I have, they're on her." Then he launched into a tirade against

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Harper Bros., saying they had treated him outrageously when he was in the West Indies—had tried to starve him to death—and would do it again—that he had been reading over the contract letter and found they had not agreed to take his work at all, and that, any way, all they wanted was to get his good work at starving prices, etc. Weldon asked him what he proposed to do about the C.P.R.R., who had advanced them money and free passage, and he replied that they could look to Harper Bros., or he could send them the new article he had just finished.

Hearn had told the truth about the letter he had sent. The one to J. Henry Harper contained many libellous charges against Alden, accusing him of defrauding him and, after pointing out that *Harper's* was not, under the terms of the contract, compelled to accept his material, he said:<sup>1</sup> "As there is no obligation on one side, I suppose there is none on the other—as the law holds." No mention was made of the obligation to the C.P.R.R. or to Weldon; in fact, he wrote that the only obligation he recognized at all, was that of telling J. Henry Harper he could "go to the devil." He enclosed his book contracts for "Youma" and "Chita," etc., in the letter and said he was returning them as he wished nothing more to do with them. By the same steamer he sent a letter to Alden, which was even more unpardonable, because he brutally attacked the motives of a distinguished, kindly old gentleman who had befriended him at every turn. It was irrational billingsgate.

<sup>1</sup> J. Henry Harper in his book, "The House of Harper," p. 588, says that he was unable to find Hearn's first letter written from Japan, throwing up the contract. These quotations were found in a letter from Patten to Weldon.



## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

"H. M. ALDEN:—

"I have received a letter from you. I have also sent you a positive request to turn over my books to Dr. Gould. I am under larger obligations to him than to you, or to any one else in the East; he wants to be paid for his kindness and his expenses, and I have nothing else to pay him with—thanks to your generous scheme to render it impossible for me, under any circumstances to earn more than \$500 a year. Whether you are offended or not has ceased to be of the least concern to me;—you abandoned me in the middle of an epidemic after getting me to make a will in your favour; you broke the promises which you voluntarily made; you lied to me in every possible manner for the purpose of duping me into the power of your brutal firm, which deals in books precisely as they might deal in pork or hay. I could have forgiven all that; but your desire to utilize me simply to illustrate the idiocies of a sign-painter, rather over-reaches the plan.

"What do I care about your vulgar Magazine, anyhow? What inducements have I ever had to allow my work to be spoiled in it? No writers worth reading want to write for you, so long as they can obtain expression anywhere else. The few good writers you have are men to whom you must pay immense salaries. Your firm is a hundred years behind; ignorant, brutal, mean,—*absurdly* ignorant,—INCREDBLY ignorant of what art is, what literature is, what good taste is. But it makes money like pork-packeries and butcheries and loan-offices make money. So that even, with the certainty of having one's work spoiled, a starving author occasionally allows you to publish an outrageously mangled remnant of his work in your



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vapid, beastly, vulgar Magazine. And because he does so, you imagine that he thinks you can give him a reputation, and that he is honoured. He has only sacrificed himself for your infernal money for a short while,—then he quits you. Your miserable \$20 per 1000 words—who cares for it at your conditions? A thousand dollars for a thousand words would not pay for the humiliation of having one's work butchered and garbled and caricatured with vulgarities, atrocious of drawing, in your infernal, common-place, beastly magazine.

“LAFCADIO HEARN.

“Ask Harry Harper whether he thinks the theft of that \$37 which he stole from me still soothes his idiotic mind.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Alden answered this in a dignified, kindly letter such as a father would write to an errant son.

“Franklin Square,

“June 3, 1890.

“MY DEAR HEARN:

“The Messrs. Harper have written to you in answer to your letters. As to the reflections upon me in these communications to my employers I have only this to say—that personally, I have tried to be your friend, expressing to you most freely my sympathetic appreciation of your genius and literary ability, sharing your enthusiasms with undisguised frankness, and co-operating with you in every way I could, always wishing for you the best success.

<sup>1</sup> In a letter written some years later to Page Baker, Hearn explains this reference. Speaking of how he earned money enough to go to Japan, he said, “Then I made a supplement for the *Weekly (Harper's)* at \$137; but the firm refused to stand by their agreement and cut down the price to \$100.”

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I have become sufficiently attached to you to feel all the pain which a friend can feel to find that his friendship has been wholly and from the first, not only misunderstood but construed into hostility.

"I never saw you before you had left New Orleans with the intention of going to the West Indies. If you will refer to my letter (in answer to one from you asking my advice) you will find that I wrote you that your best field was the one you had already occupied so strongly—where you already were. You have often, to me and to others, explained why, for reasons of your own, you left New Orleans and that nothing could tempt you to return.

"You wished to make the West Indies your home, permanently, and you went there the second time with this in view. Finding your feeling in this direction so strong, I sympathized with it, as your friend. Moreover, as Editor, I took for the Magazine, as much as I wisely could. You were detained in Martinique by a long quarantine, which I think I may safely assert that I did not establish. If you had been sent to the West Indies by the Messrs. Harper, they would have fully recognized any obligation incident to such a commission. If I had the means to do so I would have helped you in the situation in which you were placed. I had warned you beforehand—as your friend—that the house incurred no obligation and that I would not be able to help you.

"In no sense were you in the West Indies on account or by the wish of either the Messrs. Harper or myself. You know all this perfectly, and I cannot understand why you should hold me personally

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responsible for your career ever since you left New Orleans.

"I had no wish that you should go to Japan. It was only after a suggestion from another source had been made to and welcomed by you that I knew of any such scheme. I thought it was a good thing for you and frankly said so, without any reference to what you might write for our Magazine. It was an added pleasure that we might expect contributions from you. I liked to have your work on any subject. It would have been to me a still greater pleasure if I had been in a situation to officially commission you.

"I never threatened you with the resentment of the house if you should not go. You had, as I understood, bound yourself to other parties, and it was natural that as your friend I should not wish you to incur the odium of breaking a business engagement. This was on the very eve of your departure. But I told you it would be better to abandon the undertaking (with which the Messrs. Harper had nothing to do) than that you should do so after reaching Japan.

"I have been trying to recall to your mind things which I must suppose that you have forgotten. Can you not imagine the case of my having given you disinterested advice and sympathy? Why should you turn these now as weapons against me? What had I to gain from the kind of hostility—disguised as friendship—which you attribute to me? Caring still enough for you to wish you to understand me, I remain

"Sincerely your friend,  
"H. M. ALDEN."

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With this letter to Hearn went another from Harper Bros., dignified and surprisingly kindly, under the circumstances.

"June 3, 1890.

"LAFCADIO HEARN, ESQ.

"DEAR SIR:—Your interruption of the Japanese undertaking need give you no uneasiness as far as our interests are concerned. We were at no time partial to the enterprise. When you and Mr. Weldon had concluded to go to Japan, we, at Mr. Alden's suggestion, offered to you the hospitality of our periodicals for available articles on that country to the extent of 60,000 words, stipulating only that, in return, you should give us the first choice of what you might write. To prevent any possible misunderstanding, we as clearly as possible disavowed any share or interest in the undertaking itself; and your recent letters to us show that you understood this perfectly. If we had either initiated or adopted the enterprise, our arrangements would have been different.

"There is, therefore, no reason why you should return to us our agreements with you with reference to the publication of your books. We hold these subject to your order. Unless, by violation of your personal obligations to other parties, you have reason to anticipate that there might be some lien placed upon these agreements, there is nothing to interfere with our payment of these royalties to you as they may accrue.

"The other statements made by you in your letters just received seem to us too disingenuous to require comment on our part."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The House of Harper," J. Henry Harper, p. 589.

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Hearn did not answer Alden's letter, but he wrote once more to Harper Bros. in answer to theirs of June 3rd which had accompanied that of Alden.

"HARPER & BROS.

"Replying perforce to yours of June 3rd.

"1. Allow to me to state again that I made no arrangements, either verbal or otherwise, regarding the Japanese undertaking with any persons not your employés and acting as your representatives. What other arrangements were made, I was no party to, and the details studiously concealed from me until after my arrival in Japan. A typewritten document, in which I was totally ignored, then illumined me as to an official combination made between *you*, Harper & Bros., and the C.P.R.R., of which I was to be the victim.

"2. You, Harper & Bros., *were* responsible in every sense of the word. I protested against this trip, and twice embodied my protest in written form; and received written replies insisting on my going. And the statements called by you 'disingenuous,' regarding my treatment by you and your representatives, were but very mild presentations of the truth.

"3. As for your resentment with which, in spite of his denials, I was threatened by your Editor, it takes no worse shape than the refusal to pay me the commissions agreed upon sales of my book;—I have made you a present of them, rather than be cheated out of them at a later day. As for your good will, I have reason to believe your ill will much more desirable.

"LAFCADIO HEARN."



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In view of this whole correspondence, the unreasonableness of Hearn's contentions are evident. Especially so is the statement that he had been kept in ignorance of any arrangements with the C.P.R.R. Even as far back as February 12th (which was some weeks before he left New York) he addressed a letter to Alden, which we already quoted, in which he said he was to receive \$250 from the C.P.R.R., upon his arrival in Montreal. No reasonable person could have thought they were an eleemosynary institution and were making him a present of money and a free passage to and from Japan, just because they admired his literary abilities.

Before the break, Hearn had sent his first article to *Harper's*, describing the trip from Montreal to Yokohama, which he called "A Winter Journey to Japan." None of the discomforts of the voyage were mentioned, his obligations to the C.P.R.R. had been too great for that. *Harper's*, in spite of Hearn's insulting letters, published it in November, 1890, and, before it came out, sent him a check enclosed in this letter:

"Sept. 10, 1890.

"DEAR MR. HEARN,

"Please find enclosed Messrs. Harper & Brothers' remittance of one hundred and fifty (\$150) in payment for your article 'A Winter Journey to Japan.'

"By the next mail the Messrs. Harper will send you a statement of account with reference to sales of your books and sum due you for royalties on the same.

"The Messrs. Harper prefer to ignore your recent letters to them if it is in any way possible for them to make an appeal from the writer of these to

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the Mr. Hearn they thought they knew, the author of "Chita," whom they have always endeavoured to treat with proper consideration and with that frankness and courtesy which should characterize the relations between publisher and author.

"We have authorized no one to make any statement as to our disposition toward you. We do not know what other unauthorized statements have been made to you. We have had no other than direct communication with you; and that surely has been plain enough to prevent any possible misunderstanding on your part. Our letter to you before you went to Japan clearly disavowed our responsibility for the Japanese undertaking. Moreover, it must be obvious to you that we could not have bound ourselves to any other party, as you seem to think we did, and at the same time have left you and Mr. Weldon perfectly free. Mr. Weldon understands this—how is it that you do not?

"Hoping that you may reach at least a reasonable view of the matter upon due reflection, I remain, etc." <sup>1</sup>

The generous, patient letter from Alden had no lasting effect on Hearn, for a year later he wrote a friend in just as vindictive and unfounded a manner as before:

"Yes, the Harpers are a contemptible crowd;—the arch-hypocrite who edits, or pretends to be the editor, of their magazine,—is the only one against whom I feel any special resentment. He is the most astounding liar and trickster I ever met—which is saying a good deal. If I were to waste paper telling you of one quarter of the frauds he

<sup>1</sup> "The House of Harper," J. Henry Harper, p. 589.

## Lafcadio Hearn's American Days

practised in my case, you would really be surprised. Confound New Englanders anyhow!"<sup>1</sup>

A myth has grown up that Hearn refused, for years, to accept any royalties from *Harper's*; it is certain, however, that he *did* receive them quite regularly, for in a letter to Page Baker, dated Feb., 1892, he said: "Houghton, Mifflin send drafts to Baring's. *Harper's* through their London Agents."

Hearn sent no more articles to *Harper's*, nor did he ever write them again nor, at any time, communicate with the C.P.R.R. and so was concluded (before it had fairly begun) the commission that had taken him to Japan.

One by one his other ties with the United States weakened and broke. Dr. Matas, whom he had loved as a brother, he never wrote to, after he left America. They had had not even a word of misunderstanding. His correspondence with Mrs. Courtney gradually ceased, although it was really her fault. Page Baker received a few letters and even arranged to syndicate some articles for him, but Hearn left him in an embarrassing position by never completing the full number called for by the contract. As for Dr. Gould, their friendship had practically ended before Hearn left; nevertheless, they exchanged some few letters, between Japan and Philadelphia, concerning Hearn's library which Gould had secured from Alden. Hearn thoroughly hated and distrusted the Doctor, and a feeling of being a specimen bug under an entomologist's microscope had been rankling in him (owing to the intensive way in which Gould had studied the effect of his near-

<sup>1</sup> From an unpublished letter to Page Baker, October 19, 1891.

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sightedness upon his literary output), so when the Doctor wrote making a final offer about the disposition of the books, Hearn cabled the one word, "MYOPIA"—which gave the "coup de grace" to that intimacy.

The tale of his American friendships broken was almost one hundred per cent. There were only two exceptions, Miss Bisland and Ellwood Hendrick. With these, he carried on a correspondence until he died, but many thousand miles separated them from him.

Truly Hearn epitomized his own career when he wrote a friend that life was a "fighting masked ball."





## XVII: Postscript: Mrs. Baker Speaks of Hearn

WHEN Hearn was on the staff of the *Times-Democrat* he was very fond of Mrs. Marion Baker, wife of the Literary Editor, for, as he expressed it, he could talk to her "as man to man, without any of the flattery and flummery usually necessary with women." He often visited the Bakers' apartment on University Place and, on one evening in particular, stayed very late. The next day he bitterly reproached Mrs. Baker for having allowed him to make such a long visit. She made the usual courteous replies—that she had enjoyed every minute, etc., but was astounded to find, from the ensuing conversation, that Hearn's recriminations were in no way inspired by any consideration for her feelings, but were wholly prompted by the fact that to stay up late made him feel quite miserable the next morning.



## Postscript: Mrs. Baker Speaks of Hearn

Hearn had great respect for Mrs. Baker's literary abilities and confided to Dr. Matas that she was easily the best of the women poets of the South. In fact he recorded his opinion in a copy of "Chinese Ghosts" which he presented to her with an inscription written on the fly-leaf:

"TO JULIA K. WETHERILL  
—true Poet  
TO MRS. MARION BAKER  
—true Friend  
LAFCADIO HEARN  
March 14, 1887."

When he purchased a "definitive edition" of Rossetti, he presented to her the volume of poems he had bought previously and wrote in his small, delicate handwriting:

"I regret that my library stamp should be ineffaceably attached to this ghostly bouquet; but I do not think it will weaken the perfume of the spectral blossoms. If one of Rossetti's elves leap from the page to send little weird shivers shooting through you, like frost crystals, you will forget that I ever read it, turning the leaves at night.

"LAFCADIO HEARN."

Mrs. Baker knew Hearn so intimately and expresses so clearly the results of her observations that it is fortunate her memories of him are available.

"In appearance he was short and strongly built, he sought comfort rather than excellence in dress, and paid no attention to passing modes. He had

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olive skin, straight dark hair and prominent dark eyes, one of which was sightless and colourless. He has been described as ugly by some who apparently did not look beyond this disfigurement. In reality he had a fine head and well-cut features; his profile was handsome.

"In addition to blindness in one eye, he was so nearsighted in the other that when he read it looked as though he were rubbing his nose on the page of the book. As the volume of humanity cannot be perused at such close range, it is probable that he never had more than a general idea of the personal appearance of his acquaintances. It was amusing, sometimes, to hear him ascribe youth and beauty to persons who possessed neither; but as the illusion was a pleasant one, it would have been a pity to dispel it.

"There is no doubt that the loss of his eye, occurring as it did in his childhood, had an unfortunate effect on his character. He imagined himself an unsightly object. When told that a young woman had said she had expected to find Mr. Hearn a bent and withered scholar and was surprised to find him a fine-looking, vigorous man, he replied bitterly that she was probably ridiculing him. He often said that no really attractive woman could ever care for him. Some humble young girl might become attached to him, after long acquaintance, out of gratitude for his kindness; but there never would be a question of 'falling in love.' He told me of a blow once dealt to his childish vanity. Among his playmates was a very pretty little girl, and he expressed his admiration by asking if he might kiss her. The little creature replied pertly, 'No, your nose is so long I'm afraid it would stick

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in my eye,'—a retort which discomfited her young admirer greatly.

"A friend once said to him in my presence, 'Laf-cadio, if you ever marry, some morning your wife will wake up and find you gone—but she will never know why.' Mr. Hearn gave a quiet chuckle and replied, 'I see you understand me.' He declared it would be unbearable to him to have a woman questioning his comings and goings; that he would not care for intellectual companionship in a wife, but would prefer some simple, quiet creature who would look after his domestic comfort and stay meekly outside of his realm of thought. At the same time, he admired beauty in women, and was fond of children, being kind and gentle in manner toward them.

"When his articles and translations in the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* began to attract the attention of the reading public, many persons sought to know him; but he refused steadily to be lionized. He was not fond of conventionality, and shrank with misgiving from ladies who must be addressed in terms of 'polite conversation.' An almost famous beauty was anxious to meet him, so she asked me to let her 'drop in' on an evening when he was expected. The front gallery was the regulation reception room on warm evenings, and in the dim light Mr. Hearn had advanced too far to retreat when he descried the stranger. If the beautiful golden head had been that of Medusa he could scarcely have looked more startled; but he recovered himself and 'behaved beautifully,' even to relating one of those Eastern legends which interested him so deeply. He had a peculiar gift of narration, speaking with perfect fluency and ease,

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and never hesitating over a word. Perhaps one of his Greek ancestors was a professional teller of tales.

"With congenial friends Mr. Hearn was a charming companion and a delightful talker, though he never sought to monopolize the conversation. He could listen as well as speak. Rather timid in manner, his voice was low—so low at times as to be almost inaudible. He had far more humour than appears in his writings; enjoying a joke, and giving a quiet chuckle when anything amused him. Only once did I hear him laugh—and then it was a loud, wild, harsh scream like the laughter of a lunatic, which fairly startled me. It seemed to startle him too, as if he had made some unwitting betrayal of character; and afterward he appeared abashed.

"Those who were attracted by him were usually persons of strong individuality, and most of the men who were his chosen friends in New Orleans distinguished themselves later in various lines. He was a man of strongly sensual nature, and made no pretence of leading an ideal life. At the time I knew him, he professed to be an agnostic; he sneered at 'mystics'—he called Tolstoi a mystic—but it is perceptible in his writings that during later years he came to take a more spiritual view of life.

"His character presented strange contrasts. He was warm-hearted and affectionate, though at the same time extremely prone to distrustfulness; often suspecting his best friends of a design to slight or injure him. He took offence inexplicably at times, and could easily be turned against his sincere well-wishers by the malicious words of some mischief maker. 'The last speaker' left a strong impression on him—a trait which caused Dr. Gould to liken him to a chameleon.

## THE TROPICAL PALM.

[Michel's Woodyard, Orleans street, near the corner of Dauphine.]



Some whisper that it sprang from the heart of a young girl, who died dreaming of palm-fringed shores, and pining for the murmur of the sea.

Some aver that it was borne hither from the Orient by the swarthy crew of a Corsair, who landed one wild and stormy night, and slew a Turkish refugee who dwelt where the tree now stands. And having buried him, they planted the palm above his grave.

Others state that it stood three centuries ago where it stands today; that it was once blown down, and that the present graceful trunk has sprung up from the ruins of the ancient one.

And it is also said that a Spanish resident who loved palms, and who had long dwelt in tropical countries, sent for the palm over the seas, that its graceful presence might remind him of summer lands and the mystic chant of the Spanish main.

There is also a story to the effect that he who fells the tree must render up the land on which it grew to the city; but we having conversed with the owner of the

ground, were conversely informed.

The tree keeps its secret.

Whether planted by nature or by the hand of man,—by Indian or Spaniard, or French colonist,—whether created by the sweet magic of a woman's heart, as some men say;—whether transplanted from the gardens of Constantinople, as the quaint tradition relates;—whether it has witnessed the birth of this mighty city, and waved its cacique's-plume above houses that ceased to exist before we were born, through all the days of the old French and Spanish governors; whether its leaves were agitated by the distant thunder of the famous

battle with English invaders,—whether it looked down upon O'Reilly's Spanish infantry fling by;—whether it sometimes whispers its thoughts into the ear of the Night,—who shall say?

Perhaps it has a mysterious, sentient life,—and holds in the hidden recesses of its being, some strange memories of pre-existence,—of low reefs white with foam,—of untrod-den forests of taller palms,—of the chatter of apes and the shrieks of rainbow-plumaged birds,—of purple mountain peaks,—of quaint galleons and the songs of Spanish mariners. And, perchance, while striving in the night to collect these memories—faint and ghostly as objects seen through a sea-fog—it wonders vaguely that it should be able to live through the centuries, in so strange a land as this; and its leaves nod and whisper to one another until the tapers of the stars die out, and the great light of dawn glows over the river, and the noise of hammer and saw and the rumble of wagons harshly dispel the thin fancies of its vegetable brain.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Published by Hearn in the *Item*, June 5, 1880.



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"Hearn was not a good judge of character, and would often accuse quite simple and harmless persons of deep, dark subtlety. Nor can it be said that he was grateful; for he would work himself up into rages against those who had helped him materially, and declare he had suffered untold wrongs at their hands, and would abuse them in the most intemperate terms. Perhaps it was his mixed blood that made his character such a jumble of opposed traits; but at all events he was not happy, or calculated to make others happy. Charming as he could be at times, one sensed that he was not 'good to tie to.' There was none of that staunchness which is the backbone of friendship.

"Hearn was very fond of going to Grand Isle, where he and my husband sometimes spent their vacations together. It was rather a primitive place—small cottages scattered around the grounds for the accommodation of guests, and an old sugar-house that did duty as a ballroom. The waiters were not efficient; and it was one of Mr. Baker's self-imposed tasks to see that his friend got enough to eat. He ate as much as two men, and it was not always easy to keep the waiters up to the mark in supplying his wants.

"In addition to the surf bathing, the indolent island life suited him. It was there he wrote many of the pages of 'Chita,' and made studies of landscape and the changing aspects of sky and water. It seems a pity he could not have witnessed the storm, occurring several summers later, which submerged the island under some feet of water and endangered the lives of the sojourners there. However, his imagination seems not to have needed the help of reality. As he lounged about smoking his

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beloved pipe, he was storing up impressions. He delighted in the soft air and the silky water and the wonderful colours of sunrise and sunset. He would arise at day-break for a swim, going far beyond the bar, where his head could be seen bobbing about above the waves; but once some sort of large fish struck against him, and after that the fear of sharks kept him closer to shore.

“Mr. Hearn was interested in the island folk, who were mostly of mixed blood, although there were a few white Creole families among them, and liked to visit them picking up information. He had many odd tales to tell about these primitive people, particularly of one of the white islanders who lived in patriarchal fashion with numerous descendants under his roof. Mr. Hearn was never weary of watching the fishing luggers with their red sails. Perhaps they recalled the sail mistakenly used as a signal by the pilot of Theseus, after that hero's combat with the Minotaur—

“‘Scarlet in the juicy bloom  
Of the living oak tree steeped.’

No one with a sense of the picturesque could have failed to be delighted by the sight of the little fishing fleets returning at evening—sunset-light turning their weather-faded red sails to all shades of crimson, purple and dull pink.

“But though the delicious air and the surf bathing attracted Mr. Hearn to Grande Île, he had many faults to find with the place, as may be seen from the letters he addressed to Mr. Marion Baker before his friend joined him at the island. These letters are written in his peculiar chirography, mi-

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nute, but very clear, on his favourite unruled paper of bright canary colour.

"His letters from the island reveal a vein of humour absent in his literary work, though in private life his talk was often amusing. I remember a diverting account he gave of an effort to poison a howling dog—his remorse at this Borgia-like attempt, and his speedy relenting and removal of the poisoned meat. Another revelation is that of a prejudice. Whether he really detested shop-keeping Jews so much, or was only dealing in humorous exaggeration, cannot be known. I never heard him express such a prejudice in conversation; but, if it existed, it was not as serious as his distrust of Jesuits. He had been educated by that religious order and destined to the priesthood; and it was one of his manias—without doubt, groundless—that he was watched and pursued by the Jesuits.

"His letters from the island are as follows:

" 'DEAR MARION:—

" 'We have had beastly weather so far. There are perhaps a dozen people here—mostly Jews—and five more Jewish families are expected this evening, so that we shall soon have a Jerusalem Street.

" 'Three Gentiles occupy the quarters we used to frequent: 1st, Myself (I own the room formerly inhabited by That Woman); 2nd a very nice old gentleman named M.— (We have become warm friends); 3rd, Mr. E.— a very amiable and refined young Creole. We form a conclave and live outside the Ghetto. . . .

" 'I trust the weather will soon change, and that everything will be as nice as it was two years ago.

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As yet I have not made as much literary progress as I hoped, simply because I have been sick; but I am all right again now, and hope to succeed. Trusting both to see you and hear from you, I remain,

“‘Very sincerely,

“‘LAFCADIO HEARN.’

“‘DEAR MARION:—

“‘I was quite glad to see your well known hand writing on the back of a T.D. envelope, last evening, and the anticipated pleasure was more than realized.

“‘The weather is now bright and warm—seems to have set in steady for halcyon peace. More people are coming down,—a thin, thin sprinkling of Gentiles among the crowd. The sea is now smooth as glass. My fever’s quite gone; and during the surf-days I studied out two new swimming dodges for rough weather. All my efforts have been successful. But you may be sure I do not go out beyond the bar. This sea is too suspiciously full of life. At night it is beginning to be phosphorescent—which is said to be an omen of sharks. I have not seen any; but the water swarms with fish, and there is a nasty fish-parasite which sometimes fastens on you, and requires a considerable effort to disengage.

“‘The table is not good so far, this year. The Eternal Croaker prevails, and the wooden beef-steak. . . . My work progresses. [He was then working on ‘Chita.’] I have most of my scenario done, but have not yet decided what drama to use. I have three admirable plots, and shall use them all sooner or later. A whole series of projects have been evolved for me.

“‘Your coming down on the 31st will be rather

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late for me. I don't think my purse will hold out much later than the 1st;—but the thing may be arranged. I shall certainly have something to read to you.

“The magazine scheme of course interests me. B—— I can reach through two New York friends, so far as a good introduction is concerned. I am confident I shall either have *a very marked success*, or none at all. It will be one or the other. I think my style is now matured enough for what I propose to do.

“I have not yet fallen in love with a Jewess, but feel somewhat inclined thereunto. Please give my regards to all friends, and believe me, affectionately,

“L. HEARN.’

“DEAR MARION:—

“I scarcely think you will find me here by the time you come down—I am too much disgusted. Whereas the Jews pay nothing, the fury of the waiters and other employés is turned upon us Christians;—hands stretched from all points for quarters, fifty cents, dollars,—even as spokes extend toward the hub of a bicycle. But the periphery whence these hands do extend appears to be the Infinite Horizon.

“Great is the zeal of the chamber-man. He draweth the mosquito-bar at two o'clock in the afternoon. . . . Forever he listeth at doors and poketh in his head at windows. When I desire towels, there are no towels; when I have no use for towels, twenty-nine towels are at my disposal. When I want matches, lo! there are no matches; when matches are superfluous, a wholesale-grocery stock is poked before me. And forever, when I die for



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thirst, the chamber-man clinketh huge icebergs in his own pitcher. I go to the hall, drink with rage till I can hold no more—go to bed. Then, in the dim waste and middle of the night I am violently aroused by a hand thrust under my mosquito-bar, with the observation, “Drink ice-water!”

“‘Next to me are the chamber-man, the car-driver, the barber and his crew. Forever they swear and cuss and rave. And in the morning, most sweetly and ironically, they smile and smile and continue to be villains still.

“‘Similarly do the waiters proceed. If I want to sit *here*, I am sternly shunted away *there*; if I do not like Abraham Levi, Abraham Levi is placed beside me. Once I paid a dollar to get rid of Abraham Levi. But the waiter desired a dollar every twenty-four hours. . . . Therefore, Abraham Levi still poketh his elbow in my eye! . . .

“‘Krantz meanwhile playeth poker, and is a mighty player—so that none can beat him. Even should they beat him, they gain nothing, since the bar belongeth to Krantz; likewise all the bars. And the weather is bad. So, on the steamboat, (where there is no place to lie down,) people try to sleep in chairs. Then the waiters and the porters jostle them and wake them up, until they even wish they were dead. And the voice of Krantz is heard, asking them to have “a leetle game.” Then they play and pay for their peace of mind.

“‘Finally, That Woman is shortly expected. I expect to flee.

“‘Very truly and desperately,

“‘L. HEARN.’

“‘P.S. Horror of horrors! a fire company is coming down *next week*. (This is Sunday) D—n

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the island, and Krantz, and the Jews, and the Gentiles, and the sea and the infinite face of the world! My stay will be short. I'm so tired of this place that I almost wish what Beecher wished.'

"Then the enraged writer breaks into a perfect coruscation of postscripts, of the most inflammatory nature. 'Hell let loose! Howling red devils! Transmutation of night into day! Perpetual blasphemy! Desolation! Damnation!'—ending with an appropriate design of skull and crossbones.

"This outburst, provoked by the descent of the fire company upon the island, seemed to relieve his feelings, for he continued in a milder vein:

" 'DEAR MARION:—

" 'These pages were written before your welcome letter came. I will try to have everything arranged as you wish it, and will be at the wharf waiting for you.

" 'For a whole week I have been unable to do any work whatever. Outside my door is a perpetual babble . . . no sleep—disgusting incidents of petty meanness to keep a fellow mad all day. Monday, I hope for relief, as the boat is to take away quite a number of offensive people. The experience is the more annoying because it has no literary value. I have been very lazy; but it is impossible just now to write a line. "I loaf,"—as Walt Whitman says—"I loaf and look at a blade of grass." Sometimes I loaf among the porpoises. Sometimes among the redbugs. I flee to the great sun, to the burning sands, to the Cheniere'—a neighbouring island—'anywhere to escape from the shadow of the Jew. But the shadow pursueth me evermore.' "

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"Breaking off suddenly from this Hebraic obsession, he adds the unsensational postscript: 'There is a very nice planter here who knows your nice little wife's family well. You will like him.'

"After his friend had come to the island and gone back to New Orleans, Mr. Hearn wrote as follows:

" 'DEAR MARION:

" 'I've missed you, as you may suppose. Still the crowd has so thinned out that I can find the society of those left agreeable. Horror of *large* crowds. I've started on "Margot" [a sketch he was writing]. Wish I could stay here always, and raise cauliflower, and marry somebody I've seen here. She is delightfully graceful—belongs to a race perhaps the most ancient of all—"before the moon." No more crabs. Some surf. Have gained weight considerably, but have lost my ghastly appetite. Got one chapter of "Margot" written. If it hadn't got dark, I'd write you a nice, long, introspective and retrospective letter. Now I write hastily, just to show I'm thinking about you.

" 'Sincerely,

" 'LAFCADIO HEARN.'

"Mr. Hearn's fulmination against the floating population of Grande Île may be taken with a grain of salt. His love of seclusion and hatred of noisy crowds made him take the attitude that, on the island,

" 'Every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile.'

There were individual persons among the holiday-seekers whom he did dislike cordially. With one

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woman he became involved in such an unpleasant scrape—perhaps it is to her he refers as ‘That Woman’—that a friend had some trouble in extricating him.

“He had, however, no arrogance or pride of intellect. In spite of his genius and attainments, he was the least assuming of men. He found pleasure at times in listening to the talk of simple, unpretending persons, who could not meet him on any intellectual ground. In New Orleans, he lodged in the house of a family of ‘plain people’ to whom he seemed attached, sometimes speaking of the thoughtful kindness they manifested towards him. It was not ignorance he disliked, but conceit, presumption and insincerity.

“In spite of his grumblings, he loved the sea-girt sands of Grande Île, and should indeed have felt a sense of gratitude towards the place, for it was there he conceived the idea of that perfect piece of literature—‘Chita.’ ”

## THE UNSPEAKABLE VELOCIPEDE



A mad dog, a runaway horse, a drove of Texas steers on a stampede, a locomotive off the track, a hundred thousand firemen rushing to a fire, a drunken man reeling down the street with a fifty-pound can of nitroglycerine nicely balanced on his oscillating shoulder and liable to fall off without notice,—are things which may all be avoided by pedestrians possessing presence of mind and steady nerves. Because the bull, the locomotive, the mad dog, the nitroglycerine have all certain invariable and eternal rules of action, unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Given such and such conditions, we know how the terrible things above referred to will conduct themselves.

But no man ever lived—not even Moses or Solomon—who could discover any principle of action, any law governing movement, in the

gyrations of the wild, treacherous, diabolical and unspeakable velocipede. You might suppose on seeing a velocipede steering straight toward you that its furious charge might be escaped by a flank movement to right or left. But you are sadly mistaken.

You might escape an African lion or a Bengal tiger by a flank movement, but never a velocipede, which unites all the vices of ferocious beasts with none of their virtues.

The velocipede is like a vicious dog, because it always attacks any one

who runs away from it; but it is also like a lion which attacks any one who dares to face it boldly. It is like a fox in treachery, like a panther in agility, like a tiger in cruelty, like a gorilla in ferocity, like a greyhound in speed, like a badger in taking a good hold of the calf of your leg, and like the Devil for impudence.

You cannot turn a corner so quickly that a velocipede cannot turn after you still quicker. There is but one possible means of escaping a velocipede. Velocipedes are like grizzly bears; they cannot climb trees.

You must, therefore, climb a tree when you see a velocipede; but if you are near-sighted it will do you no good; for in order to climb a tree quick enough to escape a velocipede, you must be able to see the velocipede coming at the distance of at least a mile. Greased light-



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ning does not travel so quick as the most vicious and terrible species of velocipede, known as the Bicycle.

Happily the Bicycle is so vicious that few, even among the wickedest of New Orleans boys, dare to ride it.

A velocipede seems very light; but its weight increases according to the speed with which it is propelled. Sometimes it weighs several tons.

If you do not believe this, you have never been bitten in the calf of the leg by a furious velocipede.

The only way to attack the velocipede successfully is to attack their riders,—as the Romans learned to do in fighting against

trained elephants. Trained elephants sometimes turned and trampled down their own supporters. So with velocipedes. If you stand your ground well and direct your just rage and wholly excusable indignation against the rider, you will find the velocipede treacherously abandon its owner and fling him in the dust and trample wildly upon him.

But we have nothing more to say on this subject. We can only hope that all who disagree with us may be made muddy victims of velocipede wrath, and have their legs smitten by bicycles running at the rate of one thousand miles per hour.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of Hearn's illustrated skits from the *Item*.













THE

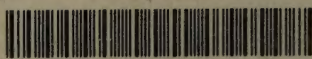


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